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The ethnicities of philosophy and the limits of culture.

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THE ETHNICITIES OF PHILOSOPHY AND THE LIMITS OF CULTURE

A Dissertation Presented

by

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ABSTRACT

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The cultural difference between the philosophies of West and East has been assumed for so long that it has attained the status of a fact. Recent developments in social and political theory have undermined this facticity by pointing toward the processes which produce such "facts," convincingly arguing that there are vested social and political interests which lie behind the designation of cultural "others." The presumption of the fact of cultural difference is thus hardly innocent observation. The critique of Orientalism, as instigated by Edward Said, is useful but limited in this regard, and this dissertation is an attempt to further the critiques of Orientalism by investigating the central, but previously unexamined, concept of culture which underpins such critiques.

This dissertation specifically examines the presumed split between Western and Chinese philosophy by carefully tracing part of the history of how Chinese philosophy comes to be understood as Chinese. For this purpose, it analyzes the work of a sampling of prominent and divergent "Western" thinkers on the "problem" of China, demonstrating that what lies behind the history of the Western/Chinese "difference" is a process of Western self-identification concomitant with a certain cultural desire. The assertion of a difference in philosophies ultimately speaks more about Western cultural desires than about the "nature" of

Chinese culture and thought. The results of this line of thought are then applied to the concepts of democracy and gender, played out against the tableau of the presumed "cultural difference" between the West and China.

This dissertation can thus be seen as arguing against the notions of culture and cultural difference as they appear in their current manifestations in liberal multiculturalism. Although seemingly opposed, the insights of Foucauldian theories of discourse and Lacanian analyses of subjective desire are utilized for this analysis. The conclusion, an argument for an understanding of culture and cultural difference which adequately captures the deep interfusion of human populations and its agonistic quality, is an attempt to escape some of the deadlocks faced by contemporary multiculturalism and to point to the directions which the ongoing diminishment of global distance compels our self-understanding as "cultured" subjects.

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NOTE ON ROMANIZATION

There are many methods of rendering Chinese words into alphabetic orthography. A brief glance at the historical documents (written in European languages) which contain romanized Chinese words will show that there is no consistent, singular system for doing so. The two most predominant methods of romanization at present are the Wade-Giles and Pinyin methods. The two are fairly similar on certain sounds, but *jun zi* in Pinyin would be *chün tzu* in Wade-Giles. Names also change significantly: *Chiang Kaishek* (Wade-Giles) becomes *Jiang Jieshi* (Pinyin).

Rather than impose one singular method on all texts and names, I have opted to simply follow the following rules:

1) The names of authors are preserved as they have been found.

2) Names familiar in Wade-Giles have been left as such.

3) All Chinese words used by me are in Pinyin.

4) Romanizations which are neither Pinyin nor Wade-Giles have been noted.

With these guidelines, I do not expect the encounter with Chinese terms in English to be too confusing or complicated. After all, I believe that there are certain English philosophers (such as Hume) whose texts remain in their original orthographic format.

CHAPTER 1

PRELIMINARIES

1.1 Multiculturalism and Philosophical Purity

Ever since Plato attempted to rescue philosophical praxis from the clutches of "sophism" (on the "other side of the world," Mencius spoke out against words which would "show animals the way to devour men"[1]), it has been possible to discern, beneath the official facades and disclaimers, the traces of a meticulous and unceasing effort to preserve the sanctity and purity of the "queen of the sciences." Although this effort is most often upheld as a necessary theoretical consequence of the unassailable desire for knowledge and truth, we might do well to remember Nietzsche's dictum that: "Every philosophy also *conceals* a philosophy; every opinion is also a hiding-place, every word also a mask."[2] Thus, regardless of what philosophy *professes* to be in search of, this earnest declaration of nobility of purpose is itself always grounded by other concerns and assumptions which are rarely questioned. The question emerges then, as to just *what* is being masked in the philosophical declamation that what is done is for the sake of truth.

The answer to this will, of course, depend upon the historical and social contexts within which individual philosophers write and think. A great deal of contemporary philosophical work has thus been done in order to sketch out the unwritten and submerged currents of thought which, although unacknowledged, nonetheless provide the constitutive conditions for official philosophical doctrine. This critical work, which

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[1] Mencius, *Mencius*, D. C. Lau, trans., (London: Penguin, 1970), 3B.9.
[2] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, R. J. Hollingdale, trans., (New York: Penguin, 1972), §289.

can be perhaps given its most profound historical moment in Marx's critique of the political and economic thought of his time, has provided useful and penetrating insights into the makeup of human societies and the sociopolitical currents which operate within them. This work of critical scrutiny has developed to such an extent that contemporary critical theory addresses every aspect of human life, whether it is focused on the "fact" of naturally sexed and gendered bodies, the segregation of the human population of the world into "races," the separation of individuals within societies by "class," or even the idea of "cultural difference" and the possibility of communication between cultures.

This dissertation addresses itself to the issue of cultural difference and the possibility of cross-cultural communication, and will also, since "everything is in everything," be concerned with problems of race, sex/gender, and class. But the primary focus of this dissertation will be "culture," particularly as a certain (Chinese) culture intersects with the West on the terrain of philosophy. The attempt will be made to isolate "culture" and philosophical deployments of cultural difference, not because matters of race, sex/gender, and class are unimportant, but because I am attempting to work through some of the implications of cultural difference and thus wish to explore the uses and abuses of culture and cultural difference by philosophy in cultural terms, *before* bringing in the problems and insights raised by work done in other areas. After accomplishing the main work along the lines of a cultural analysis, some suggestion is given, in chapters four and five, as to the ways in which this cultural analysis can help to shed some light on issues of race, sex/gender, and class. They are, unfortunately, only suggestions, and it is my hope that further work will be done to integrate these seemingly divergent foci of analysis. I do wish to make some preliminary remarks on the

intersection of race and culture, however, in order to bring to light some of the problematic aspects of the concept of culture which the next chapter attempts to address in greater depth.

1.2 The Racial Ground of Culture

The point of intersection between race and culture lies arguably in the tricky notion of "ethnicity." Omi and Winant's *Racial Formation in the United States*, an important and insightful text in the literature on race, notes that "ethnicity" is a "muddy concept" which emerged from the ashes of the downfall of more biologistic theories of race.[3] The newly formed "ethnicity paradigm" designed to combat the biological theories of race propounded in the nineteenth century stressed the fact that race is a *social*, not biological category and, as such, was merely one component among others which contributed to the determination of a group ethnicity and identity. Within these theories, ethnicity itself, "...was understood as the result of a group formation process based on culture and descent."[4] Thus, the determination of "ethnicity" is given its founding trajectories along the twin lines of (biological) genealogy and culture. Although Omi and Winant themselves ultimately reject the ethnicity paradigm as itself rife with theoretical failings, preferring instead their own theory of racial formation, we must note here that the tangled intersection between race, ethnicity, and *culture* persists even up to the present time. For when newspaper and television "news" reports refer to groups of people which were once designated as races, all too often the racial

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[3] See chapter one of Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, (New York: Routledge, 1986).
[4] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, (New York: Routledge, 1986), p. 15.

designation is abandoned in favor of an "ethnic" designation which does the same work. In common parlance, Hispanics and Blacks are no longer races but rather "ethnic groups" or "ethnicities," even though the meaning here of "ethnic group" functions in a homologous fashion to "racial group." Further, Omi and Winant note that part of the resistance to the ethnic designation has been precisely the adoption of more racially-defined social categories for the purposes of demanding equal access and rights under law. My concern here, however, is precisely with the cultural component of ethnic identity, a component which presents practical and theoretical difficulties which belie its facile usage in everyday language.

What is "a culture" anyway? And what sense does it make to speak of a culture as though it were independent of "race?" By referring to Blacks as an "ethnicity," a curious homogenization occurs, whereby the concrete differences in the ways of life of Blacks in one nation-state or another and indeed, even within a single nation-state, become reduced to the singularity of a monolithic "Black ethnicity." Furthermore, the theorizing of this singular Black ethnicity suggests a certain uniformity to "Black culture." Without this cultural component, the only significant determining factor for Black ethnicity would be biological descent; ethnicity would then be clearly synonymous with race. There is thus a connection between race and culture which must be examined. Walter Benn Michaels argument, in his piece "Race into Culture: A Critical Genealogy of Cultural Identity," that race and culture are fundamentally connected, is compelling and merits a close examination here:

> ...the accounts of cultural identity which do any work require a racial component. For insofar as our culture remains nothing more than what we do and believe, it is impotently descriptive. The fact, in other words,

> that something belongs to our culture, cannot count as a motive for our doing it since, if it *does* belong to our culture we *already* do it and if we don't do it (if we've stopped or haven't yet started doing it) it doesn't belong to our culture.... It is only if we think that our culture is not whatever beliefs and practices we actually happen to have but is instead the beliefs and practices that should properly go with the sort of people we happen to be that the fact of something belonging to our culture can count as a reason for doing it. But to think this is to appeal to something that must be beyond culture and that cannot be derived from culture precisely because our sense of which culture is properly ours must be derived from it... it is only the idea that the appropriateness of culture can be derived from race that makes it possible to think that a certain culture is the right one for a certain people. The modern concept of culture is not, in other words, a critique of racism; it is a form of racism.[5]

Michaels' point here is that our modern idea of culture *must* contain something *more than* just culture, for otherwise it would not make sense to talk, as we often do, about "losing our culture" or "regaining it." For there is, embedded within this logic of loss and reclamation, the assumption of a "proper," attached to our identity; the culture which is either lost or regained is a culture "proper" to "us." But what could this "proper" mean? Against what backdrop does this "proper" make sense? The casual positing of a *proper* culture thus necessarily entails the existence of some other category against which the authenticity of "our culture" is to be measured. This category, Michaels argues, is race.

Michaels' argument thus rests on a *normativity* inherent to our conception of culture. Since the presumption that there is a culture proper to us requires some principle lying behind it which guarantees its truth, and since talk of the culture of "a people" requires some method for differentiating "our people" from "their people," talk

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[5] Walter Benn Michaels, "Race into Culture: A Critical Genealogy of Cultural Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 18(1992): 682-683.

about cultures and cultural difference is ultimately talk about race, coded, as in the recent talk about "genetic intelligence" in the work of Charles Murray and Seymour Itzkoff, in other terms which function to conceal its true racial nature. Furthermore, from Omi and Winant's depiction of the emergence of the ethnicity paradigm, we know that culture and "descent" are coupled together in the determination of ethnicity, such that talk of ethnicity is to some extent, talk about race. Michaels' argument seems *prima facie* compelling.

But although I agree that matters of race and culture are inseparably linked, Michaels' suggestion that matters of race are fundamental and that "the modern concept of culture is... a form of racism" is problematic. People from the Middle East are routinely designated as "white" while undisputedly living in "another culture." "Asian" arguably reduces dozens of "cultures" to the monolithic status of a homogenized "Asian" and the same could be said to be true of "Hispanic." Within "white," anti- and pro-abortionists are often defined as being separate "cultures."[6] These examples suggest that it is not simply a matter of determining which category, race or culture, is fundamental and thus primary for analysis. Indeed, the deep interconnectedness of race and culture points toward multiple levels of conceptual and practical dependency which necessitates a theory and praxis which is capable of capturing the nuances of this mutual dependence. My work here thus ought not to be taken as though I am arguing, contra Michaels and

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[6] See, for example Stanley Fish, "Boutique Multiculturalism, or, Why Liberals Are Incapable of Thinking about Hate Speech," *Critical Inquiry* 23(1997): 379. The essays of Amy Gutmann, Charles Taylor, and Jurgen Habermas also differentiate between "cultures" which could arguably, though not necessarily, coexist within the racial designation of "white." Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition,* Amy Gutmann, ed., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

others, that culture, and not race, is the primary target of social critique. Rather, by attempting to examine the function of culture apart from race, I am attempting to provide a supplement to analyses organized along the lines of race, in order to flesh out the complexities and subtleties of both culture and race. I strongly suspect that it is at the limits of culture as a concept and category of understanding that we will find strong links to the concept of race. For if "culture" as a concept does "no work without a racial component," so too "race" does no work in contemporary society without a "cultural" component, some idea that the racialized other has practices, beliefs, and ways of life vastly different from "people like us."

The current impasse of liberal democratic projects, as evidenced, for example, in its inability to deal coherently with the problem of "hate speech," thus simultaneously has its roots in several areas of concern and theoretical focus: race, sex/gender, class, and culture— all of these sites of "difference" must be acknowledged and dealt with in any work which purports to descended from the critical moment of philosophical praxis. The problem is not, in my opinion, so much the lack of a proper theoretical foundation which could reduce all of these aspects of social existence to their true (read: abstracted) foundations. The point is not to deduce the universal, transcendent principle which governs the functioning of difference, but rather to come to terms with and devise feasible strategies for a world in which these divisions are becoming increasingly more complex and disunified, a world which is, in short, increasingly *interfused* on all levels of experience.

1.3 Against Liberalism, or Agonistic Multiculturalism

The situation of the "problem" of multiculturalism, understood here as the problems faced by social and political structures with respect to the "fact" of coexisting cultures which may or may not conflict in their assumptions, practices, and beliefs is currently one of many issues at the core of liberal debates on the nature and future of democratic society. Indeed, one ignores the multicultural question with great risk; even multinational corporations routinely organize "diversity seminars" and workshops in "sensitivity training." Consequently, the problem of mitigating disputes between different segments of a given population (racial, cultural or otherwise) and guaranteeing the upholding of "equal rights" among them is what drives much of contemporary social and political theory, generally taking the form of some version of multiculturalism. Unfortunately, these (liberal) multiculturalist theories often assume too much of a problematic liberal framework to accomplish their express goals. The problem with this liberal framework is precisely the primary focus of the essays which comprise Chantal Mouffe's *The Return of the Political*,[7] which attempt to argue that current liberal formulations of the problems of pluralist democracy are insuperable so long as they remain blind to the problem of the (potentially) antagonistic heterogeneity inherent to the field of the political. For since democracy is dependent upon the recognition of a homogeneous political "will of the people," and pluralism is dedicated to the sanctity of the individual, these two political principles are always at odds with one another, generating an endless seesaw between the defense of the plurality of heterogeneous individual liberties and the assertion of homogeneous popular will wherein individual

differences are subsumed within the univocity of the whole. The answer to this problem. Mouffe suggests, although she does not articulate the practical measures for carrying it out, lies in the recognition of the fundamentally agonistic nature of social spaces which not only cannot, but *ought not* be eliminated.[8]

In the case of culture, the assumption of the liberal framework for debate presents few (if any) configurations of cultural difference which are able to mediate the conflict between hetero- and homogeneity which lies at the root of the multiculturalist debate. For if Mouffe's point is to problematize both the homogeneity demanded by current instantiations of democracy and the heterogeneity which is essential to liberal pluralism, the analogue on the terrain of culture presents similar problems. Culture, as a concept, demands a certain level of homogeneity within a given population to which a certain culture is ascribed. At the same time, however, in order for culture to be anything other than a frozen, static attribute and analytic concept, it must contain the possibility for change and growth, as well as support the plurality of individual expressions of that culture. In other words, the problem is that culture homogenizes a population which is fundamentally heterogeneous— the division of the world into separate, self-contained and coherent cultures is always already an abstraction from the facts of the world.

In this respect, the question faced by multiculturalist theory is thus not so much one of *tolerance*, for the divisions which mark the unbridgeable gaps between our

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[7] Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, (London: Verso, 1993).
[8] Chantal Mouffe makes this claim at several points throughout her text but it is found most succinctly in the Introduction.

culture and theirs is one wherein the differences are not just those of "lifestyle." It is not so much a question of dress and food as it is a difference in the primary assumptions made about the nature of the world and human existence within that world. If the problem of multiculturalism is understood in terms of tolerance, then all that it is possible to say about, for example, the *fatwa* placed on Salmon Rushdie is that it is "irrational" and lies outside the boundaries of a universalized "human morality." But if the fundamental difference in worldview is acknowledged, the limits of cultural pluralism are seemingly reached— how do we tolerate someone's worldview when it is completely antithetical to our own? Can tolerance tolerate intolerance?

We have seen that Chantal Mouffe's resolution to this problem lies in some sort of unspecified recognition and preservation of the agonistic nature of social spaces. Stanley Fish, following Charles Taylor, suggests that the answer to the difficulties generated by the multicultural nature of the world lies in a sort of "inspired adhoccery," wherein the solutions produced in response to social and political conflicts are always understood as *ad hoc* and subject to revision, substitution, and change.[9] Although this strategy seems to be the most pragmatic avenue of action, I want to supplement it by suggesting that part of the problematics of multiculturalism lie also in the very ways in which we understand culture itself. In other words, in addition to the formulation of social and political strategies which are contingent to the exigencies of any given (cross-cultural) conflict, we need to begin to question our very understanding of culture itself. I do not mean to suggest that our ideas of culture are simply "false" and require the light

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[9] Stanley Fish, "Boutique Multiculturalism, or, Why Liberals Are Incapable of Thinking about Hate Speech," *Critical Inquiry* 23(1997): 385-389.

of reason for their unmasking. What I am pointing to is the work which follows, which attempts to argue that there is something deeper to our insistence that cultures remain separate and distinct, something on the level of subjective desire.

At the risk of repetitiveness, this desire for culture and its consequences for the organization of sociopolitical structures is *not* simply a false desire; it is not just another instance of the emperor's new clothes. What the analysis of this work points to are the ways in which this desire is a manifestation of *self-* (and not other) understanding. The end result is (hopefully) to point to the directions which the deep interfusion of human populations can be taken into account in a comparative philosophy and praxis which circumvents and yet acknowledges the problem of the cultural. In the next chapter then, part of the implicit argument is that perhaps a pathway out of the liberal impasse is to begin to de-abstract the individual by taking into account subjective desire, seeing "the individual" not as merely the receptacle for various "rights," but also as constituted by contradictory and meaningful desires. Regardless of whether this solution ultimately succeeds or fails, it represents an attempt to address the fact of multiculturalism without falling into the impasses which challenge contemporary liberal schemes. Given the emergence of increasingly violent "ethnic" conflicts which seemingly defy the logic of reasoned debate and rationality, we place our hopes in liberal theory (as it is currently formulated) at our own peril.

CHAPTER 2

CULTURE, DISCOURSE, DESIRE

2.1 The Status of Culture

> Philosophy proper commences in the West.
>
> —G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*

Philosophy *proper?* In the *West?* This offhand Hegelian comment, a mere prelude in his delineation of the dialectic of philosophical history and overtly an expression of ethnocentrism *par excellence,* will not be simply index-tagged as such and stored away in the warehouse of archaic, offensive forms of thought and thus escape unquestioned. Instead, this expression will be compelled to reveal its structuring logic—what follows will be a sustained attempt to reread certain traces in the history of philosophy and elsewhere as something less banal and of more theoretical import than the mere expressions of a lack of sensitivity to "difference." For there is more contained here than just Western arrogance and the arrogation to the West of the (properly) philosophical *Ursprung,* something on the order of language and the human world constituted through that language. Indeed, given that Hegel is arguing that philosophy-as-such has always been Western, and that the object of properly philosophical inquiry is *Truth,* either this "truth" transcends the specificity and contingencies of the Western cultures which enabled its uncovering and thus becomes universal— or it snaps back into these cultures, unable to escape them, unable to exceed the elastic limit of the link between philosophy and its founding "cultures." Furthermore, there remains too the question of the "proper" which distinguishes a certain type of philosophy from others, establishing a hierarchical gradation of more and less "proper" forms of philosophical

reasoning. How might this proclivity for a philosophical chain of being be related to the question of cultural difference? Might not the designation of specifically cultural forms of philosophy serve as a convenient means of differentiation in the Hegelian philosophical typology hinted at here? What might the interweaving of philosophy into the fabric of culture reveal about the logic of ethnocentrism and the status of multiculturalism? By examining the peculiar conceptual status of culture and its infusion throughout the philosophical project, I hope to uncover part of the machinery which operates behind the "arrogant ethnocentrism" present in this remark of Hegel's; the better to derail it.

This project thus begins with the observation that there is something unusual in the notion of culture and the discursive practices which articulate its various manifestations, something which permits the erasure of the mark of certain cultures while the stain of other cultures remains forever indelible.[1] What this means is that the practices of certain cultures (primarily those identified as "Western") do not retain a necessary link with their cultures of origin, permitting the elevation of the status of these practices to that of universality, while the practices of other, more unfortunate cultures are often relegated to incomprehensibility unless one possesses some minimally necessary level of knowledge about that culture which can suitably serve as "cross-cultural" hermeneutic keys. In the case of philosophy, this amounts to a certain ease with which

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[1] This is not to say that it is "simply" the case that the logic of ethnocentrism consists of erasing the "mark" of the "home" culture while permanently tagging the culture of the "other." To demonstrate the limitations of this reading, it is sufficient to point to the examples of the "cultures" of Plato's Greece and Confucius' China, wherein that which differentiates the home culture from the "barbarian" is precisely the possession of an authentic culture, Greek, Chinese, or otherwise.

philosophy designated "Western" can elude concrete links to the cultures within which it is practiced, an ease which contrasts sharply with the case of Chinese philosophy, which can hardly be discussed without standard discussions relating its concepts, structures, and styles to the "material facts"[2] of Chinese culture. By way of an example: although the translation of Derrida's essays might be heavily weighted with the linguistic apparatus of lengthy footnotes, detailing the nuances of particular French verbs, nouns, etc., this French (perhaps because it has been already properly designated as part of a Western language family) is not understood to *conceal* singularly French ontologies, epistemologies, metaphysics, etc., which are only accessible to those who speak the language. Further, there is not, to my knowledge, anyone who claims that Derrida thinks the way he does precisely because French, with its array of differences and linguistic peculiarities, conditions the possibility of his thought. But if one turns to the sphere designated as non-Western, one immediately finds that language, far from being the vehicle for the conveyance of ideas comprehensible to any human and not just those who

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[2] The term "material facts" has been highlighted here to emphasize that I am not arguing that there are indeed objective facts which must be discussed in order to assess Chinese philosophy. What I am pointing at is rather the arbitrariness as to what is to count as a relevant material fact for understanding Chinese culture and the fact that *there are no relevant "material facts" outside the theoretical decision to count things as such.* The insistence on factoring in the "relevant material facts" of Chinese culture is made by both Western and Chinese thinkers, though for different motives, an insistence which could be read as either a dispute over "the truth of the matter" or, in a less positivistic fashion, a dispute over who possesses the authority to determine what is to be understood as properly "relevant" material facts. Furthermore, these material facts are problematic in that, although it is standard practice for Marxist approaches and ideological critiques to emphasize the material bases for thought, the insistence upon the proper delineation of the Chinese material situation is performed by thinkers who could hardly claim to be Marxist. Indeed, one wonders why the insistence on the material emerges precisely when a non-Marxist turns his/her attention to the non-Western, and disappears as a relevant concern in the examination of the Western.

"speak the language," constitutes the fundamental limit for the possibility of thought by those who occupy non-Western cultural spaces.

This is *not* to say that the problem here is merely a case of some particularly virulent strand of ethnocentrism, nor is it to say that there are simply "no differences" between Chinese philosophy and its Western counterpart. It is, rather, to point to a crack in the seemingly flawless cultural integrity of both philosophies and to register a suspicion as to the composition of the link between what we call "culture" and "philosophy." For if one is tempted to simply say that those Western philosophers who write tedious articles and books detailing the infinite list of differences between the Chinese and the West are "just being Orientalist," then what can one make of essays, *written by Chinese thinkers,* which nonetheless claim in cavalier fashion, as though it could not be doubted, that the trajectories of Western and Chinese philosophies have always already been determined by the languages in which they were founded?[3] What are we to conclude when we read in the very first paragraph of Chung-Ying Cheng's "Chinese Metaphysics as Non-metaphysics: Confucian and Taoist Insights into the Nature of Reality" that because the Chinese *writing system* is "image-oriented," speakers of Chinese were thus never led to a consideration of nonsensible objects and metaphysical principles?[4] Given the dubious "validity" of such an argument, how do we

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[3] One could, of course, simply say that these Chinese thinkers are simply "poor natives" who have internalized the orientalism they have experienced, and that what "they" need is subsequently a mental unshackling accomplished by the intervention of more enlightened theoretical perspectives.

[4] This is to make the mistake of confounding *language* and the *writing system* used to record the sounds of that language. One of the founding claims of linguistics is the theoretical separation, made by Saussure in his *Course in General Linguistics,* between speech and the writing system used to record the sounds of that speech. Since the

understand this claim that, always distracted by the "pictures" of Chinese writing, Chinese philosophers were never forced to engage in the abstract metaphysical contemplations which the ancient Greeks, burdened with a phonetic alphabet, could not avoid?[5] For even if the specificity of Cheng's argument is flawed in form and content, does it not contain the assumption of a fundamental difference in culture, one which marks an unquestionable boundary between the West and China?

I do not wish to advocate here a frivolous sort of universalism, whereby "underneath it all, we are all the same." To do so would be to ignore the very real historical processes and events which undoubtedly marked the trajectories of those philosophies and philosophers which we call "Western" or "Chinese." I *am* suggesting, however, that the historically contingent differences between the thought of the West and of the Chinese do not amount to and ought not to be understood as the terms of an ineluctable, essential difference in cultures, and that further, such claims about cultures are meaningful, not because they shed some light on who "we" or "they" essentially are, but because they point to certain processes which function as a constitutive moment of social spaces. To argue that one cannot appeal to a difference in "culture" to explain the differences one discovers between Western and Chinese thought is different from arguing that we live in a world where ultimately "all cows are black." It is, first of all and at best,

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writing system is always arbitrary— any sign could be chosen to record a particular phoneme— the analysis of language is improperly focused if it remains fixated on the arbitrary signs of the writing system. It is interesting to note here that Derrida's claim of Western logocentrism fails to consider the obvious fact that claims as to the origins of philosophy, when made in a comparative context, invariably resort to a comparison of the writing systems of the founding cultures.

[5] *Understanding the Chinese Mind*, Robert E. Allinson, ed., (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 167-208.

a *partial* explanation, which is all too often taken to be the entire explanation for the differences in Chinese and Western thought. Secondly, this explanation fails to come to terms with the fact that no knowledge, even that which we hold to be most self-evident, is ever innocent, or free from, complex sociohistorical practices which both constrain and (at best partially) determine both the form and the content of that knowledge. Finally, it is to work to undermine an uncritical conceptualization of "culture" which permeates certain theories of discourse— such as Said's theory of Orientalism— which would ultimately reduce the relation between culture and philosophy to a form of discursive determinism in which everything it is possible to do or say is always already constrained by the discursive practices which dominate at the historical moment in which we live. For as I will demonstrate later, the fact these unreflective assumptions made with respect to cultures and cultural difference lead toward a theoretical black hole (to which everything— even the practice of critical inquiry— is irresistibly and unavoidably drawn) limits the possibility of the "human freedom" which constitutes the very motivation for the counterhegemonic theories in which these assumptions are originally embedded.[6]

It is at this point that it would perhaps be appropriate to address the question of the speaker: who is speaking here? For I am, after all, engaging in and shaped by

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[6] The point here is not that freedom is the condition for the development of affirmative philosophies, but rather that what purports to the be the unfettered development of affirmative philosophies (of the Kantian and Hegelian types, for example) is always already constrained by a certain self-understanding made possible by the recognition of the existence of cultural others. This argument will be developed in more detail in the chapters to follow, but here, with regard to the work of theorists like Said who *are* cognizant of the role of discursive presuppositions, the failure to take the notion of cultural difference into account prevents the accomplishment of their own philosophical goal— the advancement of human freedom.

discursive and psychological processes which condition my epistemological possibilities; the Enlightenment dream of a universal reason has been unseated by the critiques of postmodernist theories. The dutiful postmodernist would here ask the required question: If I accept the social constructedness of subjectivity, how is it that I could claim to be free, even if only for a moment, from the pull of a discursivity which demands that I identify myself, in addition to other modes, *culturally?* To this point I can only suggest that what I am attempting, an examination of certain figures in the history of philosophy with an eye to the manner in which culturality contaminates their projects as an unquestioned presence even as they attempt to disavow or ignore this presence, is an attempt at a philosophical critique which aims to reopen the field of "democratic" and "ethical" possibility beyond the terms within which it seems to be presently locked. Thus, my belief that it is, in fact, possible to escape the limitations of discursive formations (not completely perhaps, but just enough to catch a glimpse of other possibilities) is perhaps best understood as an act of faith— I refuse to submit without struggle to the power of a hegemonic theory which renders everything I say and think as completely the products of discourse. Besides, the point here is to attempt to think in a space which falls between cultures and between discourses, dependent upon but never completely falling back into one culture/discourse or another. For unless one wishes to argue that there is ultimately only *one* culture, *one* discourse, then this "space between" must be acknowledged to possess at least a temporary, tenuous existence. And if this space is possible, then it would follow that the distance which could be maintained from the pull of either culture/discourse affords a theoretical perspective different from that which would be possible within either culture/discourse. Thus the one who is speaking

here does so from a ground which would appear not to exist within the dominant discourse on culture which maintains that one *must* be located within one or the other but not both and certainly not neither.

The specific location for my examination of culture and philosophy, situated in the middle of the abyss which establishes the difference between Western and Chinese, cultures and philosophies, is chosen both because it is contextually convenient (my skills in Chinese enable me to read source materials from "that other culture") and because it is a cultural space largely unexamined in the theoretical work to which I owe a great deal of inspiration. This text is, of course, Edward Said's *Orientalism,* which has contributed a great deal to understanding the subjective consequences of the political practices of empire-building as well as the ways in which these political practices are not isolatable acts, but rather part of networks of relations which weave together such disparate areas of inquiry as philology, economics, anthropology, and literary studies in order to maintain and legitimize political power. But in the text of *Orientalism,* Said chooses to limit his analysis to an examination of the "Anglo-French-American experience of the Arabs and Islam, which for almost a thousand years together stood for the Orient."[7] He does this because, in his opinion, the "Near East" and the processes of orientalism can be discussed *separate from* the orientalism which had as its object the "Far East."[8] My work here, then, is an attempt both to supplement Said's work by examining the

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[7] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage, 1978), pp. 16-17.

[8] One might ask here whether this excuse really holds, for is not one of Said's claims precisely that the separation of the cultures of the Orient into distinct spheres is *part of the practice of orientalism* as it emerged as a science of the cultural other in the seventeenth through twentieth centuries?

orientalist construction of Chinese philosophy as an object of knowledge, as well as an attempt to move beyond the uncritical conception of culture which I believe to be inherent in Said's analysis.

Since the appearance of Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, the machine of scholarly production has produced a seemingly endless stream of variants on its themes, which all serve to reinforce and develop the theses of Said's text. With each new work which discovers yet another sphere infested with the machinations of orientalist thinking, however, it appears increasingly difficult to avoid finding it. Everywhere one looks, one finds the traces of Orientalism— in art, literature, history, philosophy, travel guides, and so on. The practice of discovering orientalism has become standard to such an extent that Disraeli's remark that "The East is a career" is ironically, with a twist in meaning, still true. But is this all that we ought to do— hunt down the innumerable traces of orientalism in all the disparate arenas of human activity, a cataloging of mistaken perceptions of those designated as cultural others? Or ought theoretical practice be aimed at, not discovering more and more evidence of orientalism, but rather at *dismantling* this particularly repressive discursive machine? If so, should not the task of theory be to uncover the processes and mechanisms which are needed for the orientalist machine's successful functioning, so as to better be able to disengage it? Furthermore, there is still the question of whether or not the theoretical conceptualization of orientalism generates the danger of a discursive trap which threatens to install a hegemonic theory of orientalism as an inescapable discourse in the place of the object of its critique. For since Said's work is based heavily on Foucauldian theories of discourse

and power/knowledges,[9] and Foucault's work seems to leave us in a space where all we can do is hope for the unpredictable occurrence of a disruption in episteme, it could be argued that even the act of resisting power/knowledge and thus orientalist discourse, is always already conditioned by it.[10] But if I may be permitted to provisionally wager that theories of discourse based too heavily on Foucault leave something out, we may discover a way out of this theoretical impasse. Let us therefore bracket this question of discourse for the moment and turn to Said's texts, to see what we can find there that could be of use in charting the circuitry of the orientalist machine. Let us make a map of the terrain before we attempt to escape this labyrinth and reconcile ourselves with Foucault.

2.2 Orientalist "Culture" and the Discursive Trap

In both *Orientalism* and its theoretical sequel, *Culture and Imperialism,* we find an interesting equivocation with regard to the concept of culture. For although Said often claims that there is no singular identity or essence lurking within those whom we

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[9] Although Said later suggests, most notably in "Foucault and the Imagination of Power," *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, David Couzens Hoy, ed., (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 149-155, that his work is an attempt to supplement Foucault's conception of power in order to theoretically envision and encompass resistances to power, the point here is that Said, in allowing "culture" to remain unexamined, produces a theory which threatens to reduce everything to the discursive, *while at the same time* seemingly maintaining that there are "real" cultures out there in the world. Thus, while Said attempts to supplement Foucault's work by incorporating the discursive production of the cultural other, his adoption of Foucauldian theory places "culture" as the foundation of analysis. Although this is not in itself problematic, his failure to critically examine it is.

[10] I will discuss this point in more detail later, but suffice it to say for now that what I mean to suggest is that Foucauldian theory leaves us in a position whereby it is seemingly impossible to devise a course of action which would alter the configurations of the contemporary episteme, since within the parameters established by that theory, everything, from the most mundane of practices to the highest registers of theory, is ceaselessly penetrated by the circuit of power enabled by the dominant discourse.

designate as cultural others, no pure essence which could serve as a proper marker for the territorial boundaries between cultures, he nonetheless lapses into language evocative of just such a divide, which is often understood as coterminous with the borders of nations. Thus, we read that "Partly because of empire, all cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic," while at the same time we are presented with evidence of *British, French,* and *American* varieties of *European* Orientalism, all of which possess *cultural* specificities made manifest in the artistic works of British, French, and American cultures.[11] Furthermore, these cultural specificities are the result of unique cultural experiences of colonial and imperial power, which function as the "unconscious positivity" of Orientalist discourse:

This cultural will-to-power and its identification as somehow the source of imperial power is perhaps the reason for Said's curious analytical distinction between "latent" and "manifest" orientalism. He writes:

> The distinction I am making is really between an almost unconscious (and certainly an untouchable) positivity, which I shall call *latent* Orientalism, and the various stated views about Oriental society, languages, literatures, history, sociology, and so forth, which I shall call *manifest* Orientalism.[12]

There are a few possibilities for the explanation as to why the unconscious positivity of "latent Orientalism" would be claimed to be "certainly... untouchable." Said could be making some sort of psychological claim, whereby there is something embedded within the human psyche which necessarily compels it to mark out cultural others and inferiors. He could also be claiming that this positivity is untouchable simply because it belongs to

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[11] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Vintage, 1993), p. xxv.
[12] Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage, 1978), p. 206.

the historical (and thus unalterable) past. But it is certainly also possible that this unconscious positivity is understood by Said as simply culture itself: we cannot question the origins of orientalism because these origins are deeply rooted in the structures and totalities of the cultures of imperialist nations. But if this is the case, then Said's claim elsewhere that cultures are fundamentally heterogeneous begins to approach the status of a utopian wish: it would be nice if we could recognize the diversity and heterogeneity within what we call our "own" culture and there might be reasons for thinking that this is the case, but ultimately there is nothing to be done, since there exists some untouchable kernel of culture, some "unconscious positivity" which anchors the shifty heterogeneity of our society, something which compels it to cohere as homogeneous (even if artificially) rather than fragment under the divergent pulls of heterogeneous moments.

Said might claim in his defense that these untouchable kernels of imperial cultures are precisely the result of the orientalist discourse which sets off the home culture from that of the other, and that these "cultures" therefore exist only insofar as they are the real effects of orientalist discourse. However, the fact remains that in *Orientalism*, these cultures *are already assumed to exist*— even if European self-understanding is modulated by its experience of empire, European cultures nonetheless exist as cultures which, while working to come to terms with the significance of empire are engaged in recasting their old trajectories in previously unconceived directions. Consequently, our understanding of the "biggest divide," that between the West and the East, although reinforced by the newly developed tools of orientalist systematicity in the age of empire, has a genealogy and an origin in the distant past:

> Consider how the Orient, and in particular the Near Orient became known in the West as its great complementary opposite since antiquity. There were the Bible and the rise of Christianity; there were travelers like Marco Polo who charted the trade routes and patterned a regulated system of commercial exchange, and after him Lodovico di Varthem and Pietro della Valle; there were fabulists like Mandeville; there were the redoubtable conquering Eastern movements, principally Islam, of course; there were the militant pilgrims, chiefly the Crusaders. Altogether an internally structured archive is built up from the literature that belongs to these experiences. Out of this comes a restricted number of typical encapsulations: the journey, the history, the fable, the stereotype, the polemical confrontation. These are the lenses through which the Orient is experienced, and they shape the language, perception, and form of the encounter between East and West.[13]

If the entangling threads of orientalist thought have their originary points in the distant past, then it would seem to be the case that our contemporary realization of their existence is too little, too late; like a novice in a game of Go, we have realized the ineluctable nature of our position only when it is impossible to prevent it. Consequently, Said's chronicling of the recent configurations of orientalism simply track out the continuations of a historical mode of thought into its present constellations; coupled with the recent emergence of the "human sciences," the Western practice of inscribing cultural others has acquired the irrevocable status of an historical *a priori* and the legitimacy of a type of science. Orientalism might have had a specifically eighteenth century configuration, but this configuration is genealogically linked to an age-old historical division between West and East which we have *always* made. The culture of the other is seemingly simultaneously both a discursive fiction emergent from the processes of orientalism *and* a historical fact— there have always been Western cultures and these have always apprehended and represented the Orient as other. As a discourse,

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[13] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Vintage, 1993), p. 58.

Orientalism thus reaches into the historical past even as it conditions the future possibilities of human history.

But beyond this equivocation as to the "constructed" and "natural" status of "culture," we must also take in account Said's wavering between asserting the non-existence of cultures as homogeneous social entities and his claims that cultures act upon one another and produce representations of other cultures so as to submit them to some relative status of inferiority. How might we understand this seeming inconsistency of the notion of culture, that while cultures are "non-monolithic," "modern Western cultures" are able to master and control "other cultures?" Said writes, for example, that:

> All cultures tend to make representations of foreign cultures the better to master or in some way control them. Yet not all cultures make representations of foreign cultures *and* in fact master or control them. This is the distinction, I believe, of modern Western cultures. It requires the study of Western knowledge or representations of the non-European world to be a study both of those representations and the political power they express.[14]

If it is the case that culture is *not* monolithic, and that every culture is always already heterogeneous, then how is one to understand the *coherence* of the political power expressed in its name? Is this power merely a manifestation of the erasure of the voices of dissent ever present within what is proclaimed a unified culture such that those who happen to wield power do so in the name of a fictitious, discursive entity? Or is there, however slight, some *reality* attributed to the culture which represents its others so as to better master them? Indeed, Homi Bhabha critiques *Orientalism* for precisely this reason, arguing that Said utilizes the unifying function of "political-ideological intention" in order to contain the binarism which is introduced in the form of the theorized split

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[14] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (New York: Vintage, 1993), p. 100.

between latent and manifest orientalism. In this way, Bhabha claims, Said attempts to suture up the gap between the unconscious of colonial desire and its positive manifestations.[15]

The problems articulated in Bhabha's critique, which focus on the failure to recognize the role of the unconscious, point to yet another sticking point in Said's analysis of the discursive phenomena of orientalism in that Said can be seen as failing to articulate the limits of orientalism as a discourse, permitting it instead to be so all-pervasive that nothing escapes its logic. If orientalism is conceptualized as the practice of representing the Orient, manufacturing its existence over and above anything which we might designate the "real" Orient, the gap between what is produced as the effects of orientalist discourse and the "human history and experience" which is elided by this discourse acquires the status of an ontological fact. We have, on the one hand, a powerful mode of imperialist imagination which attempts to systematize and organize knowledge of the lives and practices of people who inhabit certain regions of the world and, on the other hand, the lives and practices of these people which *cannot be represented,* since their reality is never what is captured in the structures of orientalism. Indeed, once the machinery of discursive theory has been set in motion, the representation of cultural (specifically, Oriental) others is understood as always already a distortion— historically contingent realities tenuously and contingently linked to the real. Although Said is careful to note that what he is concerned with is *not* the truth of the

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[15] Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism," *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures*, Russell Ferguson et. al., eds., (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), pp. 77-78.

matter, not the facts which have been obscured by the ideological mechanisms of orientalism, his insistence on the totalizing tendencies of orientalism as a Western mode of understanding the Orient, an object of study purely the constituted result of discursive practice, renders impossible the possibility of escape from orientalist discourse. As a part of the historical legacy which we did not choose but from which we cannot escape, orientalism becomes the only possible mode of articulating culture, whether it is a culture we perceive as "ours" or as "theirs."

A possible resolution to the problem of this "black hole" of orientalist discourse lies perhaps in a claim which Said seems always on the verge of making but which he never directly asserts. Indeed, the assertion of the claim that *Western culture is itself discursively constituted* would pose serious theoretical difficulties for him, given his equivocation on the concept of culture noted earlier and his seeming need for some cultures to be capable of expressing a coherent political will. For if Said needs someone to occupy the discursive position of the orientalist, he cannot then claim that Western culture is itself completely caught up in the workings of orientalism. If it were the case that Western culture was completely overwritten by orientalist discourse, then it might be argued that nothing can be done, since our roles are already scripted by the dominant discourse.[16] The criticism of a text and its author as "orientalist" amounts to a

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[16] If one argues here that our roles are not *completely* scripted by the dominant discourse, then the question becomes: how is this partial escape from discourse possible? On what grounds does it emerge, and what conditions its possibility? For if the power flowing through the discursive network filters through to all levels of existence, including the most banal, there would seem to be no theoretically possible basis for an escape, even partial, from the machinations of power. Unless, of course, one posits that power's infiltration is *not* absolute, in which case one has posited precisely the existence of the "position outside discourse."

descriptive claim, which cannot make the normative prescription that one ought not to act, think, or speak in a non-orientalist fashion since it is impossible to do so.[17]

In addition, Said needs someone to speak *as* the orientalist (or at least from the position of the orientalist), for part of the orientalist thesis is that the West, by virtue of its superior "power," proclaims itself to be that which is capable of speaking the truth of the Oriental other, and that "The West is the actor, the Orient a passive reactor. The West is the spectator, the judge and jury, of every facet of Oriental behavior."[18] The West must possess some form of agency, for otherwise the problem here is homologous to the paradox faced by certain radical feminist strategies.[19] This paradox consists of the fact that, for radical feminism, men are inherently (even if it is the result of gender-constitutive discourse) aggressive, violent, death-driven, etc., while women are inherently nurturing, life-affirming, and so forth. But if this is the case, then there is no hope for a fundamental restructuring in the social structures of gender beyond sheer miracle (a change in male consciousness and the social structures which reinforce it

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[17] This thus leads into the more general and "properly philosophical" questions of determinism, free will, and responsibility, for the status of the ethical depends upon the belief that one could have done otherwise. One could easily imagine a postmodern bigot, claiming in self-defense: "I can't help it that I am racist/sexist/etc., for after all, who I am is completely determined by the dominant discourses of my time. It is human history which is to be held accountable, not me, since I am completely caught within and determined by the logic of that history."

[18] Edward Said, *Orientalism,* (New York: Vintage, 1978), p. 109.

[19] As Ann Ferguson has pointed out, there is a distinction which needs to be made with respect to radical feminists who hold some sort of essentialist theory grounded in a sort of biologism (e.g. Mary Daly and Mary O'Brien) as opposed to those who hold that gender is instead the result of *social* construction (e.g. Andrea Dworkin, Catherine MacKinnon and Marilyn Frye). The paradox I present is primarily posed to radical feminists of the first type, although I suspect that it applies (though perhaps less strongly and in a different way) to radical feminists of the second type.

might happen as a sort of lucky epistemic accident) or women becoming more like men (becoming more aggressive in order to assume actively wrest control of social structures from the hands of men). Since the latter is impossible (radical feminism holds that women are *inherently* different from men) the most it seems we can do is to hope for that fortuitous epistemic shift which would enable an escape from the oppressive gender structures of patriarchy.[20] In the case of orientalism, if it is the case that the West is completely constituted vis-à-vis orientalist discourse, then to critique the West for what it could not help but do seems to be only name-calling which does nothing to alter the power differentials inherent to orientalism. The imperialist, death-driven West *cannot help but prey on* those it perceives as helpless others.

Thus, even if Said's work does provide some schematic of the functioning of orientalism as a discourse and his analysis works to provide at least some blueprints of the logic of orientalism, what is revealed is a machinery which requires a Western scientist for its operation. In this theoretical configuration "Orientals" are, by contrast, the raw matter for the tools of orientalist science. This manner of understanding the logic of orientalism thus necessitates the conceptualization of a fundamental binary division of the world into those who possess power and the political-ideological intentionality necessary to wield it, and those who are powerless to prevent its use upon

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[20] There is, of course, the practice of separatism: the formation of exclusive communities of women by women. But when translated into a practice with respect to culture, what this amounts to is that prescription of some form of cultural isolationism, which I would argue is pragmatically unworkable given the global nature of the world in which we live. See the paper by Ann Ferguson in *Women, Knowledge and Reality: Explorations in Feminist Philosophy*, Ann Garry and Marilyn Pearsall, eds., (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), for a presentation of precisely these sorts of problems as they present themselves in certain feminist positions.

them. The manner in which "Europeans" found themselves with respect to the Orient is thus primarily one of "exteriority": "Orientalism is premised upon exteriority, that is, on the fact that the Orientalist, poet or scholar, makes the Orient speak, describes the Orient, renders its mysteries plain for and to the West."[21] The Oriental is established as primarily an absence, defined against the presence of the words and discourse of the Orientalist, who represents that which cannot represent itself.[22]

But far from being a simple act of exclusion, an act whereby all that is not Occidental is rendered comprehensible as moments of that which is Occidental, Said suggests that the logic of orientalism simultaneously constitutes the Occident itself, as part of "Europe's" sense of self: "For even as Europe moved itself outwards, its sense of cultural strength was fortified."[23] Indeed, one of the orientalists *par excellence,* Ernest Renan, is described by Said as *becoming* an Occidental *cultural* figure precisely because of his "pioneering" work in orientalist philology. It is by positioning himself as a philological scientist out to investigate the linguistic culture of the Orient, that Renan acquires his own *Occidental* cultural authority.[24]

This suggestion, hinted at in the text of *Orientalism*, becomes more evident in *Culture and Imperialism,* where Said suggests that: "studying the relationship between the "West" and its dominated cultural "others" is not just a way of understanding an unequal relationship between unequal interlocutors, but also a point of entry into

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[21] Edward Said, *Orientalism,* (New York: Vintage, 1978), pp. 20-21.
[22] See Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage, 1978), pp. 208 and 222.
[23] Edward Said, *Orientalism,* (New York: Vintage, 1978), p. 117.
[24] Edward Said, *Orientalism,* (New York: Vintage, 1978), p. 148.

studying the formation and meaning of Western cultural practices themselves."[25] Notice here the inclusion of the scare quotes around "West," and the tentative suggestion that "Western cultural practices" are themselves constituted, although in what fashion it remains unclear. By the conclusion of the book, "Westernizing the Western" has become part of the discursive construction of cultural identity, so that "Just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities."[26] Thus, we are led to the inevitable conclusion that the West's identity, far from being an ontological constant, is instead created out of the very practice which discursively produces the Orient.

If this is the case, that even Western identity collapses into a social formation constituted by discourse, then the point here is that the West is what it is now, precisely because it became enmeshed in the orientalist discursive web. It is by means of othering the Orient that the West ever came to possess the sense of self which it now possesses. Western culture as the agent of orientalism is no more real than the Orient as constituted in orientalist discourse. This is the reason why Said *cannot* answer the question he poses in the opening pages of *Orientalism,* where he asserts that the main intellectual question raised by Orientalism is this: "Can one divide human reality, as indeed human reality seems to be genuinely divided, into clearly different cultures, histories, traditions, societies, even races, and survive the consequences humanely?"[27] For if the processes of the discursive constitution of knowledge are theorized such that "human reality" is never

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[25] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism,* (New York: Vintage, 1993), p. 191.
[26] Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism,* (New York: Vintage, 1993), p. 336.
[27] Edward Said, *Orientalism,* (New York: Vintage, 1978), p. 45.

innocently represented and is, in fact, always necessarily *outside* the sphere of the discursive, then on what basis can Said even *ask* his question, let alone claim that "human reality seems to be genuinely divided?" For all we are left with is the theoretical closure afforded by orientalism as a totalizing discourse which, as Said himself paradoxically notes, "is anathema to critical consciousness, which loses its profession when it loses its active sense of an open world in which its faculties must be exercised."[28]

What all this amounts to is a circular argumentative path centered upon the status of culture. Said claims first that Oriental cultures do not exist in the sense that they are the discursive products of Orientalist discourse. This leads to the suggestion that even the West's conception of itself as possessing a culture is unstable, since it is grounded upon the orientalist practice of demarcating Oriental cultures from Western ones. But he goes on further to claim that this practice of othering the Orient has its origins precisely in the traditions of Western cultures. As a result, Western cultures simultaneously exist as the sedimented traces of Western history while at the same time, exist only insofar as they are constituted vis-à-vis the practice of Orientalism. I do not mean to suggest here that either cultures exist or they do not. My contention is rather that the curious existential status of culture and its theoretical function in Said's works, which is intended in part to destabilize the illusory coherence of essential cultural identities, points to something more and suggests that culture is more than an aftereffect of discursive practice.

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[28] Edward Said, "Traveling Theory," *The World, the Text, the Critic,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), p. 242.

To resolve the deadlock between the existence of culture as an unconscious, untouchable positivity and as a residual effect of orientalist discourse, I will argue that there is something which needs to be incorporated into Said's theory of orientalism as it stands, which can perhaps be introduced from the theories of Jacques Lacan. But before I attempt to expand the theory of orientalism as it stands, I want to examine the work of Foucault, to further pinpoint the source of the difficulty. For Foucault's work is explicitly cited by Said as the theoretical progenitor of *Orientalism,* specifically the texts of *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish,* and what these contribute to an understanding of discourse.[29] What I will attempt to argue in the next section is that although Foucault's concepts of discourse and later, power/knowledge can be accorded an innovative and fruitful reading, these concepts are also problematic, in that they lend themselves toward the production of theories which totalize "human reality," as we have seen in the case of orientalism, into moments of inescapable discursivity that constrain from the very start the possibility that things could ever be otherwise to the result of accidental epistemic shifts seemingly beyond our control and intention.

2.3 Subjects of Discourse

The Archaeology of Knowledge represents Foucault's attempt to sketch out the architecture of a theory of discourse initiated in his attempts to pronounce the "death of man" in *The Order of Things* and the analyses of the medical subject in *Madness and Civilization.* The archaeological method established in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* was, of course, to be largely abandoned in favor of the method of the genealogy, but in

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[29] Said notes his theoretical debt repeatedly throughout *Orientalism,* but refers specifically to *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish* on page three.

The Archaeology of Knowledge, Foucault is still working at the archaeological level, attempting to establish the parameters for an alternative to the conceptual unities previously taken for granted in historical studies. These traditional emphases, Foucault believes, sought to establish the hidden order within the chaotic and seemingly jumbled mass of historical data by filtering it through a unifying hermeneutic principle, whether this principle be that of a "tradition," or of an "author," or "oeuvre."[30] The alternative Foucault subsequently suggests is to shift the terrain of analysis to that of the statement, and consequently, of discourse. By shifting the focus of historical analysis to the level of discourse and of statements, Foucault hoped to escape the "teleologies and totalizations" of the standard historical analyses, for such a shift would show that the very categories used to unify historical interpretation were the aftereffect of discursive practices which could not be apprehended otherwise. This would in turn result, he hoped, in a rethinking of the status of the *subject* as a principle for the unification of discourse, and to demonstrate that, far from being a suitable point of stability to which one could anchor the disparate and disconnected events of histories and texts, the subject itself was constituted by a system of regularities on the order of discourse and not on the order of some *cogito.* The end result would be a definitive response to the problematics of the subject emergent from the sciences of man which sprouted in the eighteenth century as well a dispersion of the transcendental coherence of the subject into enunciative modalities.[31]

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[30] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (New York: Pantheon, 1972), pp. 21-22.

[31] For example, Foucault suggests that: "In the proposed analysis, instead of referring back to *the* synthesis or *the* unifying function of *a* subject, the various enunciative

This rejection of the theoretical primacy of the subject, a move echoing the earlier rejection of the human subject as *res cogitans* in the work of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, destabilizes the subject as the site of essential qualities and identities, rendering it instead as a pastiche of historical overlays— the imbrication of multiple, fragmentary, and incomplete discursive processes. After all, following the philosophical assaults on the notion of a transcendental truth, could there be any doubt that the subject was soon to be dismantled as well? But the problem here is that what remains after the subject becomes mapped onto the domain of discursive practice, is nothing. It is as if the discovery that our ideas of ourselves are the result of complex historical processes which function in the discursive realm announced the fact that we, who had discovered this, no longer existed except as different constellations of these processes. Foucault attempts to remedy this, of course, by maintaining in his later work that the subject becomes inscribed upon the physicality of the body.[32] What we had once presumed to be naturally given in its plenitude was instead simply a blank and mute body onto which history could be recorded. But even if we can accept this account, there is still some vestige of

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modalities manifest his dispersion.... And if these planes are linked by a system of relations, this system is not established by the synthetic activity of a consciousness identical with itself, dumb and anterior to all speech, but to the specificity of a discursive practice." *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (New York: Pantheon, 1972), pp. 54-55.

[32] Nancy Fraser points to a problem with this conceptual maneuver in chapter three of *Unruly Practices*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), where she argues that if Foucault indeed is arguing that the body is not a given category, then Foucault's very choice of the body as the site to begin the work of theory is called into question. For if the body is instead a locus of power which is called into being as a discursive category, the result of various "micro-practices," then for Foucault to isolate the body as an analytical focus is to fall prey to those very regimes of biopower he wishes to unseat. Here, the question concerns the status of the subject as a conceptual starting point, and the fact that the subject is seemingly completely decomposed into the operations of discourse.

seemingly deterministic thinking which must be taken into account. For if the body is the site of social inscription, who or what is it that is performing these processes? Or is it the case that they "just happen?" After all:

> The body is the inscribed surface of events (traced by language and dissolved by ideas), the locus of a dissociated self (adopting the illusion of a substantial unity), and a volume in perpetual disintegration. Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history. Its task is to expose a body totally imprinted by history and the process of history's destruction of the body.[33]

The sense here, that some*thing* is responsible for the inscription of history on bodily surfaces recalls what Foucault says earlier in *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* where what matters is the systematicity of discursive rules and not the individual who speaks, for ultimately this "individual" is constituted and made possible only through discourse.

The discursive subject is caught to such an extent that not even desire can be understood as non-discursive. In *The History of Sexuality,* one of Foucault's concerns is precisely to show how even sexuality and the most seemingly natural of desires are also the products of a long and painful process rather than being simply raw facts of biological existence. I have argued elsewhere[34] that the Foucauldian attempt to relocate the terrain of philosophical debate, à la Kant's relocation of metaphysical questions into the epistemological field, is an attempt to relocate the epistemological in turn to a field of power. Epistemological questions are thus irresolvable so long as they remain purely epistemological questions. Once translated into the language of *power/knowledge*, analysis becomes possible. Foucault's theory thus seems to point us toward some form

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[33] "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow, ed., (New York: Pantheon, 1984), p. 83.
[34] Joseph Yeh, "Foucault, Kant, Nietzsche: Epistemology and the Politics of the Subject," unpublished manuscript, University of Massachusetts Amherst (1994).

of power as an emergent property from the totality of the discursive as the proper focus of critical inquiry.

But it could be argued that there are disturbing political problems with this line of argument. For if discursive formations are ultimately the "cause" of the subject and nothing escapes the workings of discourse, then historical (and thus social and political) change can only be understood in terms of a dehumanized "power" which cannot be wielded by anyone and which cannot be resisted. Even the resistance to power is constrained by the discursive possibilities which articulate the subjective modalities of resistance to power. Like Sisyphus at the moment when the rock has rolled, as it always does, back to the bottom of the hill, the human condition consists solely of the recognition that this is our fate: an existence constrained by circumstances which we are doomed to only *recognize*.

This is, of course, the point at which Said takes issue with Foucault, arguing that there are always real, political interests involved in the exercise of power. But although Said proposes a theoretical maneuver designed to extricate analysis from the closed-circuit of discourse, Said's overreliance on too simplistic of a Foucauldian notion of discourse necessitates its ultimate failure. For since the Foucauldian subject exists only on the level of discourse, subjectivity is constituted solely on the plane of the social. Individuals exist only insofar as they are interpellated by the dominant discourses of the time. What exists, and what persists, is the network of discursive relations which determines the possibilities for what it might mean to exist as an individual.

We can perhaps understand now why the status of culture is so problematic for Said. For if theories of discourse subordinate the existence of individuals to the

existence of the discursive, culture understood as a network of social practices must be understood as structurally equivalent to discourse. In other words, culture does not exist unless it does so as some form of discourse. To attempt to analytically distinguish between the two is to run the risk of beginning to talk as though there exists some sort of cultural essence which underlies the discursive as its untouchable, unconscious ground. The differentiation of the spheres of the cultural and the discursive renders the cultural as something which exists outside of discourse but which is nonetheless organized by discourse and leads to the theoretical possibility that either this something can be called the "French," "American," or "Chinese" essence and that there are consequently inherently different cultural essences, or underneath it all, this something is the same for everyone: all humans, stripped of the multiple layers of discursive guises, possess some universal human constant, whether it is seen to lie in a basically human experience or in some grain of quintessentially human essence.

The latter is what seems to emerge from Lacanian theories of subjectivity, and this is what now demands our attention in our interrogation of the status of the cultural as a prelude to an examination of the interrelationship between the cultural and the philosophical. For while Foucault could be argued to have reduced the status of the individual to the secondary effect of discourse without providing an outlet which could prevent us from lapsing into the pure and absolute determination of the subject by discursivity, Lacan's conceptualization of desire and its role in the constitution of the subject might provide a way out of the discursive deadlock. For although Lacan can be seen as understanding the human experience as consisting in a relationship to the social

sphere mediated by the use of language and speech, there is nonetheless more to the constitution of the human subject than simply a discursive effect.

2.4 Lacanian Culture

The strange thing about the work of Lacan is that although he makes reference to thinkers and texts which could be argued to lie outside of Western spheres of culture, these references do not appear to rely upon this cultural difference in order to function as argumentative support for the claims he makes. Whether it is Zhuangzi's parable of the butterfly in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis,* or the commentary on the *Brihadaranyaka-upanishad* in *Ecrits,* Lacan seems to be oblivious to cultural difference in his gathering together of references which could serve as illustrations for his thought, evoking the consideration that what he is after is beyond the limitations of a given cultural space. In addition, Lacan's references presume the possibility of cross-cultural understanding— the meaning of Zhuangzi's parable is not assumed to be inaccessible *a priori* simply because it is a text from "another" culture. Given this preliminary and superficial observation, it is perhaps hasty but justifiable to ask whether Lacan ultimately intends his theory of the subject to be universal in its application. In other words, when Lacan speaks of subjective constitution in the face of the Symbolic as part of the aftermath of the formation of the ego in the Mirror Stage, is this intended to be a universal description of human subjective formation? Or is this yet another instance in which "Western" categories are arbitrarily superimposed (in standard imperialist fashion) over the whole of the world?

There have recently been attempts to recast Lacanian ideas with an eye to exploring its possibilities in the work of social and political thought, as exampled in the

work of Slavoj Zizek, Renata Salecl, Joan Copjec, and others. Indeed, in the introduction to *The Sublime Object of Ideology,* Zizek claims that a turn to Lacanian theory not only "opens up a new approach to ideology, allowing us to grasp contemporary ideological phenomena (cynicism, 'totalitarianism,' the fragile status of democracy)," but that it does so "without falling prey to any kind of 'postmodernist' traps."[35] In light of the problems generated by the conceptualization of the subject (as cultured or not) in the work of Said and Foucault, I want to argue that it is possible to read Lacan as providing a way out of the cultural deadlock, even though it may not be the most desirable of paths and may suggest that what Lacan seeks is, after all, something universal in the formation of the human subject.

In order to attempt to discover this Lacanian solution, it will be necessary to establish some theoretical signposts which will prevent us from losing our way. The first of these is, of course, Lacan's theoretical "registers" of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real. The Imaginary can be understood as that space in which the individual ego is constituted, governed by relations of narcissism and identification. Lacan's rereading of Freud leads him to theorize the "ego" something other than what is typically meant in psychological theory. Instead of viewing the ego as some sort of stable agency of compromise seeking to mitigate the conflicting demands of the superego and the id, Lacan relies on a narcissistic conception of the ego, in which the ego is seen, not as some presocial individual presence of self, but rather as the effect of social (non-biological) interventions in the development of the individual.[36] The ego is thus always already

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[35] Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London: Verso, 1989), p. 7.
[36] For a thorough discussion of the distinction between the "realist ego" of ego-

caught up in a dialectic between a certain desire and the other, a dialectic which produces the subject as an effect structured on nothingness, a lack. In this sense then, the ego is not to be understood as or equivalent to the pure presence of the subject, but rather as a moment in subjective experience:

> There's not doubt that the real *I* is not the ego. But that isn't enough, for one can always fall into thinking that the ego is only a mistake of the *I*, a partial point of view, the mere becoming aware of which would be sufficient to broaden the perspective, sufficient for the reality which has to be reached in the analytic experience to reveal itself. What's important is the inverse... the ego isn't the *I*, isn't a mistake.... It is something else— a particular object within the experience of the subject. Literally, the ego is an object— an object which fills a certain function which we here call the imaginary function.[37]

We can see here certain structural similarities to the Foucauldian conception of the subject, where what we take to be the transparent "self" is instead the result of something social and non-biological. But where Foucault contends that subjectivity is constituted by the dominant discourses which call forth its being, the constitutive moment of the Lacanian subject is rooted in the *desire* of the individual, a desire which emerges from the individual's relation to an other, imaged or otherwise. From the moment when a human infant comprehends that the image it sees before it in the mirror is an apparently whole and complete representation of itself, that infant is propelled into a series of identifications with something other than itself, each motivated by the desire to be whole, to attain to the impossible ideal unity exemplified by the mirror image:

> What did I try to get across with the mirror stage? That whatever is in man is loosened up, fragmented, anarchic, establishes its relation to his

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psychology and Lacan's preference for the "narcissistic ego," see Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction*, (London: Routledge, 1990), especially chapter two.

[37] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book Two*, Sylvana Tomaselli, trans., (New York: Norton, 1988), p. 44.

> perceptions on a plane with a completely original tension.... Man's ideal unity, which is never attained as such and escapes him at every moment, is evoked at every moment in this perception. The object is never for him definitively the final object, except in exceptional experiences. But it thus appears in the guise of an object from which man is irremediably separated, and which shows him the very figure of his dehiscence within the world— object which by essence destroys him, anxiety, which he cannot recapture, in which he will never truly be able to find reconciliation, his adhesion to the world, his perfect complementarity on the level of desire.[38]

From the Imaginary, the subject moves into the realm of the Symbolic, where the act of entering a linguistic community and learning to speak furthers the development of subjective coherence. Since the ego is understood to be "frustration in its essence" because it cannot realize its desire to be whole, and finds that it is to be forever constrained and defined by some "other," it is driven to seek out recognition by and in the other, so that its existence can be acknowledged and thus guaranteed. Since this acknowledgment must take place somewhere outside of the individual, we have moved out of the Imaginary realm and into the Symbolic. Lacan writes:

> In the human subject, desire is realized in the other, by the other.... That is the second moment, the specular moment, the moment when the subject has integrated the form of the ego. But he is only capable of integrating it after a first swing of the see-saw when he has precisely exchanged his ego for this desire which he sees in the other. From then on, the desire of the other, which is man's desire, enters into the mediation of language. It is in the other, by the other, that desire is named. It enters into the symbolic relation of *I* and *you*, in a relation of mutual recognition and transcendence, into the order of a law which is already quite ready to encompass the history of each individual.[39]

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[38] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book Two*, Sylvana Tomaselli, trans., (New York: Norton, 1988), p. 166.
[39] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book One*, John Forrester, trans., (New York: Norton, 1988), p. 177.

Further, although the Symbolic is essentially a linguistic realm, since the dialectics of recognition and the other must take place in speech, the Symbolic is not concerned with meaning in language but rather with the differences brought into existence by the linguistic function of the signifier over that of the signified as part of the structure of language and communication. These differences do not consist in the mere inability of the signifier to adequately express the meaning of the signified, but lie rather in the structural difference between signifiers:

> A psychoanalyst should find it easy enough to grasp the fundamental distinction between signifier and signified, and to begin to use the two non-overlapping networks of relations that they organize. The first network, that of the signifier, is the synchronic structure of the language material in so far as in that structure each element assumes its precise function by being different from the others; this is the principle of distribution that alone governs the function of the elements of the language (*langue*) at its different levels....[40]

Since the Symbolic has nothing to do with meaning, the network of diachronic, i.e. *historical*, meaning invested to the signifier as its signified lies within the sphere of the Imaginary. Lacan writes, "There's no doubt that meaning is by nature imaginary. Meaning is, like the imaginary, always in the end evanescent."[41] But since meanings are inherently unstable, linked as they are to the capriciousness of subjective desire, what possesses theoretical primacy is the linguistic chain of signifiers.

In a Lacanian conception, the Symbolic can thus be understood as the domain of culture, wherein the networks of signification enacted in language are utilized in the work of separating the "human" (and thus cultural) from the "natural." The Symbolic

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[40] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, Alan Sheridan, trans., (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 126.
[41] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book Three*, Russell Grigg, trans., (New York: Norton, 1988), p. 54.

can thus be seen as the "ordering function" of culture, whereby culture is given its systematicity and form:

> A psychoanalyst must secure his position in the obvious fact that, even before his birth and beyond his death, man is caught in the symbolic chain that has established linkage before history elaborates it... caught as a whole, but like a pawn, in the play of the signifier, and this even before the rules are transmitted to him.... Such an order of priorities has to be understood as a logical order, that is, as an always actualized order.[42]

This order is the result of the institution of the regulations of social ties of kinship and the laws of marriage, which emerge out of the social necessity of regulating reproduction.[43] This order is further linked to the individual by the formulation of the Oedipus complex and its resolution, as well as to the prohibition of incest and the paternal "Name of the Father" which functions as the support of law for the Symbolic register.[44]

Given the failure of the signifier to ever adequately capture reality— reality is always expressed in the medium of signs and thus always at least once removed from what might be said to constitute reality— Lacan permanently forecloses the possibility of ever saying something which might be true in the sense that it completely expressed "reality." Like Kant's world of noumena, inaccessible to the movements of reason, Lacanian "reality" is removed to the third register, that of the Real. The Real is that which precedes the Imaginary realm of the ego and its organization, as well as that which

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[42] Jacques Lacan, from the French edition of *Ecrits*, as cited in Marcelle Marini, *Jacques Lacan: The French Context*, Anne Tomiche, trans., (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), p. 45.

[43] One might, of course, question Lacan's dependence on the anthropological theories of Levi-Strauss, but this question will not be addressed here.

[44] See Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, Alan Sheridan, trans., (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 66-67.

cannot be fully represented in the Symbolic. It is not reality in the sense that reality is only comprehensible in the significatory terms of the Symbolic, but it *is* reality in the sense that it is like the Kantian "X," the transcendental Thing which is responsible for representation but which cannot itself be represented. The real is thus that which "resists symbolization absolutely."[45] It represents the limit of the subject[46] and is as such, "the impossible."[47]

Since the Real resists expression in the Symbolic and cannot be incorporated into the Imaginary (to give it a meaning on the level of the ego would again be to symbolize what cannot be symbolized), it marks a certain gap in the field of signification, where meaning as understood in either the Imaginary or Symbolic registers, cannot appear. Culture then, has no visible or definable links to the real; it is an entirely Symbolic function which is taken up in various forms on the level of the subject in the Imaginary.[48] Established as an ordering function of the Symbolic, culture necessarily contains the

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[45] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book One*, (New York: Norton, 1988), p. 66.
[46] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 49.
[47] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 167.
[48] Lacan, does not, to my knowledge, explicitly state this, but I believe it to be a theoretical consequence of the way in which the three registers of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real are posited. For if the Imaginary is posited to be the space wherein the ego is formed, on the basis of an image, this image must, beyond corporeality, take on racial, sexual, and cultural characteristics. Witness the way in which culture, for example, is coded by the way bodies appear as cultured in any of the new "multicultural" commercials for airlines, sodas, cars, and so on. Since commercials rely upon the ability of the viewer to uncode certain information about the product on display, advertisers have had to rely upon certain symbolizations of "different" cultures such that, in the end, the individual subject attains to a some sense and degree of belonging or possessing some culture or another.

significatory gap inherent to the Symbolic, so that however coherent a culture might seem to be, its symbols and codes ultimately attempt to conceal the fact that culture is not *real* and does not express some reality outside these symbols and codes. For Lacan, culture is an ordering function governed by a certain Master Signifier[49] (a signifier which possesses no meaning but functions rather to guarantee the meaning of all other signifiers) established as a reaction-formation which attempts to close the gap between the natural and the human, a gap paralleling the gap between signifier and signified. This gap consists in the fact that on the one hand, humans are caught up within the mechanism of the "death drive," whereby we are driven to a "blind automatism of repetition beyond pleasure-seeking, self-preservation, accordance between man and his milieu,"[50] while on the other hand, we are animals singularly tormented by the presence of the "insatiable parasite" of reason, animals who *speak.* Thus the "cultural fiction" consists in the fact that although we know very well that we are biological organisms subject to the biological laws which, as delineated by science, govern life, we nonetheless attempt to establish ourselves over and beyond that biological existence by establishing culture as that which marks us as somehow "different from" the rest of life.

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[49] Curiously, Lacan proposes along these lines the notion of the "c factor" but fails to develop it further. This "c factor" is the "constant characteristic of any given cultural milieu" and the American "c factor" is identified by Lacan as "ahistoricity." Thus, the c factor seems to be more of a descriptive characteristic of cultures, and not a signifier as such. Rather than pursue the possibilities of the c factor, which I believe ultimately relies more upon the process of signification embodied in the language of the unconscious than upon some sort of cultural essence, I have chosen instead to focus primarily on the signification of culture, and not on the task of delineating the c factors of various cultures. See Lacan's brief mention of the c factor and the c factor of the United States as "ahistoricity" in *Ecrits: A Selection*, Alan Sheridan, trans., (New York: Norton, 1977), pp. 37-38, and 115.

[50] Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London: Verso, 1989), p. 4.

It could be argued at this point that we have arrived again, via Lacan instead of Foucault and Said, at an understanding of culture as some form of discourse. But where naive Foucauldian theories are led astray by the failure to comprehend the Real— that which *cannot* be expressed within discourse but which is the necessary moment of its emergence— and where Said is misled to think that the "unconscious positivity" lurking behind latent Orientalism cannot be analyzed, the development of Lacanian theory here with respect to culture suggests preliminarily that culture *is* an object which can be captured by analysis, with a certain caveat. This caveat consists of the recognition that the codes and symbols of each culture, its practices, discourses and documents, can be analyzed only with respect to its own internal "logical order" as a chain of signification, wherein each element receives its meaning from every other signifier in the chain, held in place by the one signifier which cannot be analyzed in and of itself (because its meaning is dependent upon the configuration of the other links in the significatory chain), the "quilting point"[51] which functions as the master signifier. Furthermore, the examination of the logical order of cultural codes ought not to be mistaken for the uncovering of structural mechanisms in their gloriously complete positivity, since this order exists to paper over the fact that there is no order outside of that which is imposed arbitrarily, in a fashion apropos of the arbitrariness of the choice of linguistic signs. Thus the attempt to subject the totality of human culture to analysis is doomed to failure unless one takes

[51] This "quilting point" refers to the empty, meaningless Master signifier which, by virtue of its semantic emptiness, is able to "fix" the meaning of other signifiers, freezing them into a particular constellations of meaning in the social and political sphere. For a more sophisticated explication, see Slavoj Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London: Verso, 1989), especially the beginning of chapter three.

into account at the outset that one always operates, whether one likes it or not, within a discourse governed by an ultimately meaningless master signifier which one cannot choose.[52]

2.5 Desire, Cultural Identity, and the Cultural Fantasy

If this were all there were to a Lacanian reading of culture, we might find ourselves in serious theoretical difficulty, since we have yet to discuss the desire of the individuals who compose the cultures in question. How do we account for the fact that, even though the master signifier which holds a culture together is meaningless and in some sense arbitrary, human subjects nonetheless submit (willingly or not) to the function of a particular master signifier and in essence, identify themselves culturally? Without a discussion of the interpellation of the subject by culture, we would certainly not be far from the formulation of culture as discourse which I, rightly or wrongly, attribute to Said and Foucault. To initiate this discussion, it might be helpful to consider an example of a conceptualization of culture which fails to take this desire into account and which thus runs into problems it cannot resolve.

In *Ideology and Cultural Identity,* representative of texts which seemingly present a purely discursive reading of culture, Jorge Lorrain attempts to account for the processes of the acquisition of cultural identity by painting the following picture:

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[52] This master signifier is "meaningless" in that there is no truth of the matter, no adjudication possible between, for example, the meaning of "America" as characterized by "ruthless individualism" or "insistent ahistoricism." The master signifier which governs a "culture" is such that it is always under contestation, its meaning never "given" but produced retroactively by the desires of the individuals who accede to that culture. Thus, the Lacanian formulation here provides an avenue for critical intervention which a more discursive theory does not; it provides a *target*.

> At the basis [of the circuit of the production of cultural identity] there is a complex society with an increasingly diversified culture and a huge variety of ways of life. From this complex reservoir, cultural institutions such as the media, churches, educational and political apparatuses produce some public versions of identity which select only some features that are considered to be representative, and exclude others. These public versions in their turn influence the way in which people see themselves and the way they act through a process of reading or reception which is not necessarily passive and uncritical. Public versions are constructed from ways of life but also constitute sites of struggle which shape the plurality of ways of life.... The criteria for defining cultural identity are always narrower and more selective than the increasingly complex and diversified cultural habits and practices of a people. In the public versions of a cultural identity diversity is carefully concealed behind a supposed uniformity.[53]

The structure for the acquisition of cultural identity can thus be presented as the following closed circuit: ways of life—cultural production—public versions—readings—ways of life. Further, the emergence of the unity of a cultural identity is understood as the result of some process of institutional selection— some traits are selected while others are rejected. Once transformed into the official, "public" concept of what the culture is, this culture is "read" and internalized to some degree or another by individuals who attempt to integrate and reconcile that public version with what they themselves do or think.

What this establishes for Lorrain is a conceptual split between "ideological" and "non-ideological" representations of the home culture. "Ideological" conceptions attempt to conceal the fact that the representation of what the culture is fails to acknowledge the "real diversities and antagonisms in society," while "non-ideological" conceptions of culture, particularly the cultures assumed by those properly designated as

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[53] Jorge Lorrain, *Ideology and Cultural Identity: Modernity and the Third World Presence*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), pp. 163-164.

"the minority" by the dominant culture, are such because "unlike the dominant versions [of culture], they do not conceal but highlight the contradictions."[54] In this picture, the cultures of resistance are assumed to be somehow more accurate in their representation of the ways of life of certain segments of the population than the dominant cultural representation.

But what this simplistic analysis misses completely is the fact that even if one accepts the distinction between the ideological and non-ideological conceptions of cultural constitution, the only conclusion can be that there exists no conception of culture which is not ideological. For surely those who identify with the "culture of resistance" themselves also possess "increasingly diversified ways of life." Consequently the adoption of the culture of resistance as an identity can only be at the expense of papering over the real antagonisms and differences between the individuals who are presumed to identify with that very culture of resistance.

In addition, what is it that determines how an individual "reads" the prescription of what it means to belong to the dominant culture? Given that the "public version" of the culture arguably matches the real lives and practices of very few individuals within a given society, what could compel these individuals to see themselves as belonging to that culture? Why identify with something which fails to accurately depict the concrete ways of life in which you carry out your existence as a member of that "culture?" In short, what is missing from this discursive theory of culture is precisely an account of the desire of the individual to identify as a member of a particular culture rather than another, an

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[54] Jorge Lorrain, *Ideology and Cultural Identity: Modernity and the Third World Presence*, (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), pp. 164-165.

analysis of the desire for culture. Lorrain, given his differentiation of ideological and non-ideological forms of culture, must acknowledge that there exists the concomitant distinction between desires to identify with a culture which are pure and impure: impure desires are the result of an "uncritical reading" of the public version of the culture as properly representative of the way of life of all individuals living within its space, while "pure" desires somehow preserve the antagonistic character of a heterogeneous society. This pure desire thus depends upon an empirical fit between the way of life depicted by a culture and the ways of life of the individuals who claim to be of that culture. But the paradox of this pure desire for cultural identification lies in the fact that culture, as a generalized abstraction from the ways of life of a set of heterogeneous individuals can *never* "fit" the lives of the real individuals who identify with it. Furthermore, the fact of cultural change, the contingent character of the ways of life of a cultural group ensure that the "fit" between the individual of that culture and its generalized form never holds, even for communities of resistance. What it means, for example, to be a member of black culture now does not correspond with what this meant in 1950, even though the culture can be said to exist in both time periods. Assuming for the moment that those who assume the identity entailed by the culture of resistance do so willingly, a Lacanian response might be that this desire precisely affirms their presence as the "other" within the social space of the dominant culture and thus, instead of constituting a "real threat" to the dominant discourse's conceptualization of culture, functions as its very support.

In order to support this reading, however, we need to briefly sketch out Lacan's formulation of desire. For Lacan, desire-as-such is always constituted vis-à-vis the

other: "Man's desire is the desire of the Other."[55] This desire emerges as the result of the psychic development of the subject, whereby the initial impulses of need and demand are supplanted. The immediate physical needs of the human infant, which cannot be self-satisfied, are satisfied by the other (typically but not necessarily the mother). The satisfaction of these needs requires their articulation in speech, even if these consist of the inarticulate screams of infants. But, as Lacan notes, the function of demand, the calling into presence of the Other for the satisfaction of needs, is soon transmuted into the demand for the unconditional love of the Other:

> Demand in itself bears on something other than the satisfactions it calls for. It is demand of a presence or of an absence.... Demand constitutes the Other as already possessing the 'privilege' of satisfying needs, that is to say, the power of depriving them of that alone by which they are satisfied. This privilege of the Other thus outlines the radical form of the gift of that which the Other does not have, namely, its love. In this way, demand annuls... the particularity of everything that can be granted by transmuting it into a proof of love, and the very satisfactions that it obtains for need are reduced to the level of being no more than the crushing of the demand for love....[56]

But since *this* demand, the demand for the unconditional love of the Other, cannot be satisfied, what remains as a leftover after the satisfaction of material needs is desire: "Desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction, nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second."[57]

Since desire is always the desire of the Other, what the desire for identification as a member of a resistant cultural community can be understood as amounting to is the

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[55] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Alan Sheridan, trans., (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 235.
[56] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, Alan Sheridan, trans., (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 286.
[57] Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: A Selection*, Alan Sheridan, trans., (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 287.

assumption of the position of being the object of the other's love, an object, that is, whose existence is acknowledged by being the object of the other's desire. Thus, if cultures are formed by a certain superposition of a unified identity onto a heterogeneous social space at the expense of the exclusion of individuals whose ways of life do not coincide with the dictates of this identity, then we are placed, as desiring subjects, in the structural position of desiring to be identified as a member of that culture, the true bearer of its name and thus worthy of respect. Since the position of the Other must structurally exist— there must always be those who fail to be identified as members of the dominant culture in order for the distinction to be of any use (otherwise, *everyone* is a member of the culture and that "culture" fails to mark any significant difference)— the act of self-identification as a member of a culture of resistance, the *other* culture, is tantamount to the complete identification with one's role as other, an example of ideological interpellation *par excellence*. This explanation of the desire for culture perhaps explains why, in the era in which "we are all multiculturalists,"[58] there is nonetheless no significant decline in the amount of ethnic and racial violence. The simple assumption and identification of the position of the cultural other by adopting the identity of the resistant or minority culture does nothing to alter the fundamental structure of the desire for cultural identity. It amounts to, on the contrary, the structure of that desire carried to its logical conclusion: I *am* what the other demands of me.

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[58] This is, of course, the title of Nathan Glazer's recent book, where the claim that "we are all multiculturalists" simply refers to the fact in the pragmatic sense, we simply live in an era in which we *must* pay attention to the presence and "traditions" of cultural others. See Michael Berube's review in *The Nation*, 12 May 1997, pp. 38-42.

What does the theoretical factoring-in of the desire of the subject contribute to an analysis of cultural difference and identity? First, the consideration of the desire for culture adds the recognition that the problem of multiculturalism is more serious than the suppression of and intolerance for difference. For since it is the very desire to be identified as the bearer of some culture or another which is the root of the problem— the successful satisfaction of this desire necessitates the presence of individuals marked as other— the problem of other cultures is not merely the problem of the specification of rights and respect for these. In fact, what is called into question is a fundamental process in the contemporary construction of the subject. Consider the multicultural practice in schools of examining the traditions of one's "native" culture by researching its history, customs, and practices. What does this amount to if not the attempt to sustain the fantasy that, at the core of our subjectivity, there lies some eternal, positive cultural moment? That underneath it all, we are the representatives of some culture or another? It is enough to imagine the response of the teacher to the child who, bewildered, cannot identify his/her home culture. The cultural fantasy on the level of the subject thus consists, not so much of the fact that we might somehow think "our culture" possesses superiority over another, but in the fact that we believe that we are ever the representatives of a culture.

The analysis of culture thus consists, not of the objective, non-normative analysis of the rules which govern symbolic space, but rather in the analysis of the extent to which individuals fail to "fit" within the social space demarcated by the mandates of culture. In other words, the point at which critical inquiry must begin are those points in which cultural "slips" can be detected, where culture erupts, like a blister, where it

seemingly ought not to appear. That is to say, points at which culture is offered up as the reason for why some state of affairs is the case. Thus when an "American" makes a claim about a non-American and justifies this claim with the assertion that the other belongs, after all, to *another culture,* what is being offered up is *not* the culture of the other but rather the expression of the cultural desire of the American. To give another, "philosophical" example, one might ask why "China" appears in the writings of Leibniz far more often than those other, more properly philosophical terms, "monad," "entelechy," and so forth.[59] Further, one could wonder as to why this fact has been subsequently "erased" by generations of "philosophers" who have chosen to ignore it. Why should a "culture" in which Leibniz showed such interest be entirely eradicated as significant to understanding his philosophy while at the same time, those who are understood as representative of that culture cannot produce a philosophy which can be discussed apart from that culture?

2.6 The Permeability of Cultural Space

At this point, then, we are led to the question of cross-cultural communication, for given that the structure of cultural desire works by the exclusion of the other and the demarcation of the desire of the other from what is presented as the subject's proper desire, what emerges is the idea that the other is utterly incomprehensible, formulated on cultural grounds entirely incommensurate with the subject's own cultural grounds. Furthermore, unless there is some means to account for cultural interfusion, whereby cultures are accorded the possibility of fusion with cultures perceived as other, instead of remaining purely intact and separate, like a mixture of oil and water, the only possible

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[59] See the section on Leibniz in chapter four.

theoretical basis for cultural politics remains some version of liberalism and its language of rights. For if culture do not interfuse, then the recognition of cultural difference and intercultural "justice" can only consist of the ascription of inviolable and equal "rights" to each individual "culture," apropos of the attribution of rights to the individual/citizen in liberal politics. This, in turn, generates complex and perhaps irresolvable political dilemmas.[60] How, for example, in this conceptualization of the cultural interactions and rights, do we account for the rights of the native cultures inhabiting the United States, which exist within its borders, although marked off into "reservations?" Is there something isolatable and clearly distinct as "black culture," and how are the "rights" of this culture to be formulated? In fact, the various violent eruptions of "ethnic violence" in recent times suggests that the refusal to understand culture as always already interfused with what is supposed to be other is an unworkable and deadly way of understanding what we mean when we say we belong to a culture.

In Lacanian terms, the basis for these ethnic conflicts (as well as the function of Orientalism) can be understood, not as the erasure of cultural difference, but as the attempt, by those who identify with one culture, to instantiate that culture as the universal culture possessing "more reality," whether this is the dismissal of "non-Chinese" as "barbarians" or the dismissal of the "Chinese" as "heathens who never produced science." In each case, the attempt is made to superimpose the ordering function of one culture onto the whole of the Symbolic. What casts this

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[60] See Charles Taylor's sustained attempt to resolve the problematic of "cultural rights" in *Multiculturalism and "The Politics of Recognition": An Essay*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992).

conceptualization of the function of Orientalism differently from its formulation in Said is the fact that this attempt at the superposition of particular cultures over others *cannot be avoided.* Just as the proper functioning of language depends upon the assumption that the other to whom we are speaking will know what we mean when we speak, the proper functioning of cultural desire depends upon the presumption that there is no other alternative to the organization of social space other than the form which we are given. Or, perhaps better phrased, this is to say that the successful functioning of culture as the constitutive, totalizing moment of a social space requires the objectification of the belief [61] that it is unique in the way it regulates and formalizes the practices of everyday life. Part of the belief that I am a member of a particular society as well as a bearer of its culture is the presumption that there exist others who "do not do what I do" or do what I do "but in a completely different way, characteristic of *them.*" Suffice it to recall a joke from the currently popular American sitcom *Seinfeld,* where the observation is made that the Chinese are incomprehensible (and thus fools) for insisting on continuing to use chopsticks when forks and knives are "obviously" easier to use. It would be like, he claims, continuing to use sticks to plow fields after the development of more efficient farm implements. This "obviously," addressed to the audience and bearing the burden of cashing in on whatever is comedic in the observation, depends upon a certain

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[61] The "objectification of belief" is a concept developed by Slavoj Zizek in chapter one of *The Sublime Object of Ideology,* and is developed from his rereading of Marx' concept of commodity fetishism. Zizek's point is that what occurs in commodity fetishism is not the making real of a belief held by the capitalist subject, but that rather it is the enactment of certain social practices which make the belief real. Thus belief (in the commodity form), instead of falling primarily on the side of the subjective, falls instead outside the subject, in the subject's objective practices.

commonality of practical experience and thus functions as a moment in which we all recognize, we users of forks and knives, that "obviously" forks and knives are much easier to use but *they,* the Chinese, are stubbornly insistent on doing things their own way and cannot recognize this fact. The ideological operation of this joke lies, not in the way it "misrepresents others," but in the way it compels the audience to commit to their existence within only one culture *at the same time as it also depends upon a minimum level of cultural interfusion.* The joke fails, after all, if we do not know what chopsticks are, have never tried eating with them and failed, etc. In addition, the jokes unifies, in a certain laughter of mutual recognition, the cultural desire of the audience so that the object of desire, American identity, can be acknowledged by all to be indeed the proper focus of desire.

Consequently the belief in the univocity of "our" culture can be seen as functioning as both the necessary belief for the successful enactment of the cohesion of the heterogeneity of the human individuals who comprise it, as well as an ideological screen for the fundamental impossibility of this homogenized heterogeneity. But beyond this ideological functioning, the belief in the unity of "our" culture also masks the fact that cultures are always already interfused, and that the other has always been both a physical and structural presence necessary for the enactment of cultural desire. Thus, it is always already "too late": once we realize the presence of elements of the "cultural other" within our borders and attempt to reinstantiate some version of cultural purity, this cultural purity is already irrecuperable. We might here consider the case of the "immigrant problem," particularly with regard to the US-Mexico border at San Diego, where each night, illegal immigrants begin to line up on the Mexican border, waiting for

nightfall to make the trip into the United States. If, as certain American politicians claim, this problem is one which is truly destroying the American economy and eliminating American jobs and so forth, then the solution might simply be to fill the land surrounding the border with landmines (leaving the major thoroughfares unmined, of course) or simply to divert adequate resources to the policing of the border. But the fact of the matter is that the economy of the region is too heavily reliant upon the availability of cheap (illegal) immigrant labor, so that a more stringent policing of the border would actually cast the local economy into severe chaos. What might we make of the scapegoating of these immigrants, then, since their continued presence is necessary to the economic well-being of the region?

It would be simplistic to say that this immigrant-bashing is "just" scapegoating, for it works too well. If it were just scapegoating, would it not be sufficient to reveal the truth of the matter and to demonstrate the area's dependence on immigrants, and the fact that the picture of the immigrant as the "lazy stealer of jobs" is a gross contradiction? The reason why the persecution of immigrants works as an function of ideology is precisely because they are understood as coming from *another culture,* marked by an *other* language, *other* beliefs and *other* practices. This cultural difference, furthermore, cannot be mitigated, for the other must remain other, so that we may maintain the belief that, "were it not for their presence, we would all be happy and united, we of this culture."

Consequently, the belief in the fundamental presence of different cultures is a belief enacted, not because it accurately describes reality-as-such, but because this fiction is necessary for the maintenance of the imagined unity of "our" desire, "our" culture. To

give this a more "concrete" form, we could consider the case of paper money. At one point the "value" of money was coterminous with the material out of which it was formed. Thus the "value" of a gold coin was the "value" of the gold contained in the coin. But with the advent of paper money, all that remains is the form of money itself; the paper itself is "worthless." So wherein lies the "value" of paper currency? The answer is that its value depends completely on the *belief* that it is "worth something," that despite the fact that I and others know full well that it is "merely" a worthless piece of paper, we nonetheless believe that it possesses value. It is sufficient to simply tear up a piece of paper money to experience the depth and strength of this belief.[62] Thus, culture "possesses value" only if I and others believe that it constitutes a coherence which cannot be broken up; once I admit the radical contingency of the practices, beliefs, etc., which comprise "my culture," I have come to acknowledge the radical contingency of sociality itself.

The various manifestations of "different" cultures can thus be understood as being unstable partitions of the Symbolic which each possess their own internal logic of coherence. The myth of cultural integrity, the idea that "we" are a people organized and grouped by certain practices, rituals, codes, etc., is thus a fundamental misrecognition of

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[62] Zizek suggests that the function of paper money is to signal the transition from the Subject to the barred-Subject, for the historical development of paper currency includes as a moment an intermediary stage whereby paper currency was issued by banks, payable to the bearer. It is not simply the case that the money thus acquires its value from the fact that the bearer has been "universalized," and could be "anyone," but rather that money acquires its value when we, as subjects, come to the recognition that this "bearer" stands in for us, in that we ourselves are contingent beings, "bearers" of accidental, empirical characteristics. See *Tarrying with the Negative*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), pp. 27-29.

the Symbolic, the Big Other, whereby each of us "Americans" believes that the master signifier which organizes our culture is closer to what "reality" is than other signifiers. Take the American belief in "democracy," for example. One cannot question the status of democracy without being subject to strong recriminations: to question democracy is to be communist, anti-human, totalitarian, etc. But given the fact that the American political system, which so loudly professes to be democratic, is arguably not very democratic at all,[63] what sense could we make of this fetishization of the notion of democracy? And to keep things fair here, consider the notion of Chinese "tradition." Chinese politicians and philosophers make frequent reference to the notion of some inherent Chineseness as embodied and demonstrated in Chinese tradition by citing various historical sources, texts, parables, and so on. But what happens when we take into account the fact that the majority of the "classics" of the Chinese intellectual tradition are works compiled over hundreds of years, forgeries, edited compilations, and misattributions?[64] What is one to make of one's tradition if that tradition has been forged?[65]

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[63] See, for example, Lani Guinier's critique of the American "winner take all" system of electoral politics in *The Tyranny of the Majority*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994).

[64] See the forthcoming (Columbia University Press) translation of the Confucian *Analects,* in which the translators (E. Bruce Brooks and Taeko Brooks) have practiced a sort of hermeneutical "science" in order to differentiate between different historical strands of thought in the *Analects* to show that the work, far from being the work of a single man, the "greatest teacher" in Chinese history, is instead the work of multiple authors, each appending and developing the ideas of those before him, so that the final text as it appears today represents nothing like a "text" as we understand it— a line of thought developed as written down (in some form or another) by an author.

[65] Ann Ferguson has pointed out to me, quite correctly I believe, that perhaps the notion of Confucius as an author serves as a unifying fiction whereby discourses which are evolving attempt to stabilize themselves by arrogating to themselves the legitimacy of an origin

The point of all this, of course, is not to simply say that culture does not exist and that those who think that they belong to some culture or another are thus deluded. This would simply reduce culture to the status of a "false belief," a purely imaginary fantasy which could be dispelled through demonstration and sound argument. Far from it: cultures are very real in their effects— they govern and regulate social and individual behavior and limit certain historical possibilities for the group which identifies it as the mutually acknowledged object of desire. Further, what gives culture its "reality," what informs it with meaning, is the link between the individuation which occurs in the Imaginary register as it intersects with the level of the Symbolic. Culture then, has a real tie to the level of the individual on the level of desire. The individual is not merely an effect of interpellation into the Symbolic because what cannot be factored out as solely the effect of the Symbolic is the presence of *desire*. The individual *desires* to identify with/as some culture or another, since it is this culture which functions as the basis of individual identity. Recently, I was purchasing roast duck in a shop in Chinatown (an extravagance I am perhaps overly fond of) when two white, middle-aged couples[66] happened to wander by the shop, picking their teeth with toothpicks. They observed with disgust (by frowning, recoiling, and so forth) the roast ducks hanging in the

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grounded in an "author." As such, she argues, the concept of "forgery" really does not apply. However, my point here is that many Chinese texts simply accept this authorial legitimacy without question. Witness the scores of Chinese dictionaries which provide pinpoint dates for the origins and births of figures in Chinese antiquity for which there is no archaeological evidence. This insistence on their facticity is precisely an attempt to ignore the constructed nature of "Chinese tradition" by claiming that they are instead historical fact, despite the lack of evidence for being such. "Forgery" then, ought perhaps to be taken in the sense of "constructed," and not in the sense of the substitution of the inauthentic for the authentic.

[66] This identification is made solely on the basis of observation.

window, and all agreed that there was something strange with this way of doing things. On one level, this is simply "cultural intolerance"— the expression of disgust at practices in which one does not engage. But at a more significant level, this recoiling at the disgusting, traumatic presence of dead, roast ducks, heads and all, signals the assertion of cultural identity at the level of desire— "Who would *want* to eat *that?*" Or perhaps more accurately but unspeakable, "What *American* would want to eat that?" Thus, although we might understand culture as a sort of discourse, it is nonetheless a discourse *enacted* by the presumption of the unidirectional desire of the subjects who identify themselves with that culture. The expression of disgust at the hanging ducks reflects not so much an "unwillingness to experience the culture of the other," as much as it does the insistence on the alterity of the other's desire. "We," all desire the same things.

If culture functions as a way of suturing up the heterogeneity of the aggregate of individuals who comprise a society, and if its ideological functioning depends upon a certain misrecognition, a conflation of the limits of the home culture with the sphere of all that is "human," the universalization of the particularity of the home culture, then it is perhaps time to turn to the case of philosophy, that once self-proclaimed, universal "queen of the sciences," in order to demonstrate and trace the circuitry of the cultural machine delineated here. For if we examine the case of the emergence of "Western philosophy" and its assumption of the role of "Philosophy proper," apropos of that offhand comment of Hegel's which began this chapter, we will find that what happens in the world of philosophy sheds light on the status, not only of philosophy, but of culture as well. As I will show in the following chapters, Western philosophy has had a history of attempting to distance itself from the reality and materiality of culture, trying

desperately to present itself as something universal and beyond the constraints of culture. This is not to say that this is not true of other philosophies and that they have not performed the same distancing function. But what is different in the case of Western philosophy is the fact of the erasure of its own cultural distinctiveness in the pure structures of its philosophy, while non-Western philosophies tend to cast this difference in terms of an ethnicity which is not erased but rather affirmed. Thus, what are we to make of the Western "resistance to culture" and how might that recast the cultural difference which underlies the perceived "gap" between Western and non-Western philosophies? It is with this in mind, as well as the reconceived concept of cultural desire developed here, that I turn to the analysis of a certain philosophical "cultural" difference.

CHAPTER 3

THE LOCATION OF DIFFERENCE

3.1 The Cultural Problem

> *History of China.* I only believe histories whose witnesses are ready to be put to death.
> Which is the more credible of the two, Moses or China?
> There is no question of the broad view. I tell you that there is enough here to blind and to enlighten.
> With this one word I destroy all your arguments. 'But China obscures the issue,' you say. And I reply: 'China obscures the issue but there is light to be found. Look for it.'
> Thus all you say serves one of these purposes without telling against the other. So it helps and does not harm.
> We must look at this in detail, then. We must put the evidence on the table.
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> —Pascal, *Pensées*

If there is something to be gained by an analysis of the history of "Western" philosophy with an eye to those desires which are articulated in the language of culture, the question may then be asked: what is it, exactly, that is desired here, and what is the status of that subject which desires? For if the desire to be recognized as the representative of some culture is part of the constitutive fantasy regulating the operation of social space, then what are we to make of the fact that one can discern within the texts of what is designated as "Western" philosophy the clear traces of an evolving form of self-understanding grounded upon an unquestioned culturality? Thus, this chapter begins the task of tracking the signification of *Chinese* philosophy as it appears within and is delineated by what ultimately understands itself as being *Western* philosophy. In other words, this chapter begins an analysis along the trajectories traced in the previous chapter by examining the functionality of a certain "cultural difference" as it operates

within (Western) philosophical texts. For if the previous chapter was successful in problematizing the uncritical usage of "culture," then what are we to make of the idea of cultural *difference*? If *culture* is an unstable conceptual category, linked to both the discursivity of knowledge production as well as the workings of desire and subjectivity, then the espousal of differences *between* cultures must be suspect as well. What we discover, as we begin to examine philosophical texts which treat of the difference between "Western" and "Chinese" philosophies, is precisely that differences in philosophical outlook are understood to be grounded upon differences in culture. Consequently, our analysis begins by attempting to determine the operational utility of cultural difference within those texts which purport to tell us something about the differences between us and them, between their thought and ours.

The reason for this focus stems, not so much out of the urge to "correct" misreadings of the true meanings of Chinese philosophical texts,[1] but out of the belief that part of the basis for the theoretical and conceptual difficulties generated within the contemporary debates over the status of culture and the practice of multiculturalism can be more fruitfully resolved by recourse to an analysis of the very desire for culture itself. Also, if there is ever to be the development of something we could call "comparative philosophy," the cultural differences which are said to underpin differences in philosophies must be rigorously examined. What will be discovered here, then, are not the truths of Chinese philosophy, but perhaps the silent presence of a generally

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[1] Indeed, this very urge owes its existence to the unquestioned assumption of the "difference" between cultures, a difference assumed to grounded within the ineluctably different "essences" which constitute the cultures in question.

unacknowledged ethnicity of "Western" philosophy.[2] Consequently, the aim here is to move beyond the simplistic claim that Western philosophy is Orientalist in its apprehension of those deemed to be cultural others and to attempt to effect a disruption of the conceptual coherence of "Western" philosophy itself. I wish to show that what the continual presence of "Chinese philosophy" within the texts of "Western philosophy" points to is thus not simply the fossilized lines of deeply embedded Orientalist ways of thinking, but rather the positive traces of the centrality of the desire for culture within what comes to understand itself as "Western philosophy." For without the ability to point to some philosophical other, Western philosophy might perhaps never have risen to a certain level of cultural self-consciousness and thus come to identify itself *as* "Western Philosophy." To refer to these positive traces as "just" Orientalist thought in need of reform is to ignore the *constitutive* moment of cultural desire and to thus construe it as simply a sort of misguided mindset in need of a corrective visit by the PC-police.

The philosophical endeavor begun here is not meant to be exhaustive, however, and can best be understood as a preliminary figuring of the presence of Chinese philosophy in the philosophy of the West. For this reason, it was unnecessary to survey the entirety of Western philosophy (a daunting task), and the analysis which follows this chapter primarily focuses on a seemingly eclectic series of figures in the annals of

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[2] This ought not to be taken to mean the positing of some sort of "Western essence" at the core of Western philosophy, but rather to suggest part of the argument which follows, namely that part of the consequence of the representation of non-Western philosophies as always already marked by their home cultures is the inescapable conclusion that Western philosophies cannot themselves escape the pull of culture. Western philosophy thus becomes tightly culture-bound, foreclosed from the very possibility of the universality it seems to arrogate to itself.

philosophical history: Leibniz, Nietzsche, Hegel, Marx, Dewey, Russell, and Beauvoir. It would have been interesting to have included as well a reading of Malebranche's "Discourse Between and a Christian Philosopher and a Chinese Philosopher," an inquiry into Heidegger's fascination with the *Dao De Jing,* or even a critical survey of the scattered, offhand comments and references to the Chinese and Chinese thought in the works of Hume, Kant, Mill, Sartre, etc. But the text is instead focused on the chosen figures because in each case, the quantity of text, as well as his/her individual notoriety accords that case greater significance. Malebranche is hardly on an intellectual par with Marx. Furthermore, despite the great disparity in the philosophical frameworks and methodologies encompassed here, all of the personages surveyed approach the Chinese and Chinese thought by assigning to it the status of a *problem.* For all the thinkers to be considered (with perhaps the exception of Nietzsche), the Chinese and Chinese thought appear as *foreign objects* which need to be integrated within the conceptual schemas each develops and thus rendered comprehensible to the philosophical apparatus each employs. Pascal's remarks above might therefore be seen as the quintessential statement of the challenge posed by the "discovery" of Chinese civilization and the increasing degree of cultural contact and interfusion: how are "we" in the West to understand ourselves if the narratives of self-identity to which we have long been accustomed are shown to be in need of revision?

3.2 The View from the Outside

The status of the Chinese problem is understandably different for each of the thinkers to be considered in this work; I am not attempting to develop a monolithic theory which completely captures all of the nuances of their approaches to the "Chinese

problem." Rather, I am attempting to get at a certain commonality which runs throughout their work, diverse as it is. What is therefore striking is the fact that "Chinese" always locates a certain space, whether culturally or philosophically, *outside* of what is implicitly understood to be the closed spheres of the "Western." The relation between West and East is always already rooted in the ineluctable difference between the two, a difference which positions one culture outside of and detached from the culture of the other. The point here is not that there is, in reality, "no difference at all," but rather to question the desire to maintain that this difference is real and grounded upon some difference of cultural essence. What, exactly, is at stake in this desire? For the sake of clarity, three general moments of philosophical desire have been isolated. First, there is simply the assumption of the integrity of the social spaces governed by the laws and regularities of different cultures. This is what will be examined in this chapter. In this case, the desire for culture is understood as the desire for a position completely exterior to the stifling, hermetically-sealed cultural space within which the "Western" thinker finds him/herself. The desire for a sort of culturally free, theoretical space is not itself the problem; the problem lies in the assumptions made with respect to cultural difference which enable this theoretical jailbreak. Second, there is a sort of Western "self-confirmation" which is to be found most prominently in the work of Leibniz, Hegel, and Marx, and which will be examined in the next chapter. Finally, this "Western "self-confirmation" is contrasted against the projection of a fantasy of Western "self-fulfillment" as seen in the work of Dewey, Russell, Beauvoir, to be explored in Chapter four.[3] These broad categorizations of approaches to that "other," Chinese

[3] The problem here is, of course, that a "fantasy of self-fulfillment" can be understood as

philosophy/culture, are not meant to be essential definitions, however, permanently fixing the status of the works of these thinkers within a particular configuration characterizable too easily as Orientalist. We are after the logic of the desire for culture as embedded within the enterprise of Western philosophy, and not merely the identification of certain statements or modes of thought *as* Orientalist.

Apart from the designation of an exterior location, the assignation of the status of a problem to the Chinese and Chinese thought also has the consequence of relegating to them the theoretical position of being the *object* of investigation, a position analytically external to that of the philosophical examiner. This exteriority, perhaps assumed for the purposes of objectivity in the quest for knowledge, in turn reinforces the necessity of the cultural alterity of the Chinese. For if *they* were too similar to *us*, it would be difficult to suggest that the philosophical analyses which are produced are somehow free from the bias of self-blindness and a certain lack of self-reflection. But this is not to suggest that consequently there holds here a strict causal relationship, whereby the necessity of the external position of the theorist is causally responsible for the cultural difference which will be ultimately posited. Rather, what is being suggested here is the fact that the cultural positioning of the philosophical theorist poses methodological problems which

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itself a form of "self-confirmation." The distinction between the two which I am attempting here is thus a subtle one, relying for its efficacy on the distinction to be made between the affirmation of the West's superiority *as such* (found in Hegel, for example) as opposed to the affirmation of the West's *possibility*. In other words, the division here might be seen as centering upon a certain loss of innocence: the moment of self-confirmation locates the giddy moment when the West seemed to present all human possibility in its industrialization and conquest of the globe, whereas the fantasy of self-fulfillment occurs after the realization (prompted by the eruption of earth-shattering global war(s)) that the possibilities embodied by "Western" culture were hardly being brought to actuality by the practices of those cultures.

obfuscate the supposed facticity of the cultural difference presumed to exist between Western and non-Western philosophies. The very identification, therefore, of the Chinese as a theoretical problem already presents the Chinese as an externalized object of investigation, a system whose limits are already drawn.

This chapter is thus primarily concerned with the *location* of cultural difference: How is this difference understood? How is it utilized, and for what ends? What might therefore constitute an appropriate segue into this investigation is a preliminary analysis of this view from the outside, as evidenced in the opening remarks in Michael Brannigan's *The Pulse of Wisdom*[4], purportedly an introductory text to the philosophies of India, China, and Japan. Although the text itself is trivial, being only one of the ubiquitous, generalized introductory readers mass-produced for university-level "cultural diversity" courses, the stance which the text adopts with respect to the object of its concern is not. In fact, a brief examination of this stance serves to provide a good example of the argument that has just been made concerning the problematic, exterior status of the "cultural difference" of the Chinese.

In Brannigan's preface to his text, he describes how his mother (who is Japanese) once brought to his sixth grade classroom a hand-carved replica of a Japanese home. He recalls, among other things, the excitement at unraveling the mysteries of its interior, claiming at the end of the anecdote that "the more precious lesson had to do with the idea that we never really begin to know a house until we live in it for a time."[5] What *we*

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[4] Michael Brannigan, *The Pulse of Wisdom*, (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1995).
[5] Michael Brannigan, *The Pulse of Wisdom*, (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1995), p. xiii.

therefore need with respect to Asian philosophy (it is never clear, of course, to whom "we" refers) is "this view-from-within," in order to properly begin to understand it.

What could this banal anecdote add to the (introductory) reader's understanding of Asian[6] philosophy? If we accept what it claims to offer us, namely the provincial wisdom of a sort of ethnic relativism, then we are left only with the perhaps correct, but analytically useless adage that one cannot understand what one has not experienced, and that one must "live as they do" in order to "understand what they think." To have "lived" in another world is to better "understand" that world. Thus, what is proposed here is a sort of "First Principle" in the hermeneutics of multicultural caution: do not be so quick to judge the thoughts and ideas of others until you have considered the conceptual contexts in which they live and think.

But if that is all that is to be gleaned here, all we know is that *I* cannot understand *you*, the reader of this text, until I have lived in your world for a period of time. This is probably no surprise, as it is a commonplace and intuitive notion which we all have of the lives and experiences of other human beings. Where, then, does "the Asian" appear in this? For it appears that while we might understand the limitations of our own individual experience and intuitively know that we cannot have unlimited access to the thoughts and experience of other human beings, we nonetheless want to say that the experiences of *some* subset of human beings are "closer," more knowable, than that

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[6]Of course, Brannigan simply ignores the fact that "Asia" refers to a far larger cultural are than simply "China, India, and Japan," his definition of what constitutes the "Asian" cultural system. His naive usage of the term simply reflects contemporary usage, which somehow "sees" the Middle East, Islam, the Soviet Union, and so on, as simply subsumed within the category "Asian," which for Brannigan designates *only* China, India, and Japan.

of other groups of human beings. Living here in America, it seems perfectly fine and indeed, *reasonable,* to say that not only is my experience *different* from the experience of the people living in China, but to go even farther and say that my experience is *more similar* to those who also live within the United States. How, then, to account for this *difference*?

Let us return to the anecdote recounted above. Is it really the case that Brannigan and his sixth grade peers have actually "lived" inside that Japanese home? Clearly not. What *has* happened, although Brannigan would be loath to admit this, is that he and his classmates have *examined* the interior of the Japanese home from a rather *non*-empathic perspective, one homologous to the epistemological standpoint of "Western" science. For it is *this* perspective, which clings to the notion that the investigation of an object from the exterior yields knowledge as to its essence, which permeates his account. How else are we to understand that he claims to have understood the house "from the inside," as though he had lived *within it?* The investigation of an object from the outside, or perhaps more accurately in this case, from the perspective of Gulliver, does *not* constitute so much the acquisition of a subjective "having-walked-in-your-shoes" perspective as much as it mirrors the perspective of an ornithologist examining with delight the nest of some exotic species of unfamiliar bird.

This perspective from the exterior is no accident, for it returns when Brannigan turns his attention to what appears *prima facie* to be the greatest obstacle in the philosophical encounter between West and East: the task of translating between languages. In his brief introduction "to" the Chinese section of his introductory reader, Brannigan writes that "In Chinese, characters replace the alphabet used by most other

languages. These characters are ideographic representations within an experiential context. Therefore, the language lacks grammatical precision."[7] There are already several glaring problems with this "argument" as it stands, particularly in the curious "therefore," but we read on to discover that "We are not claiming that intuition is stressed in China at the expense of rationality or logic. Chinese philosophy does exhibit various degrees of analytic sophistication."[8] Let us pause here: if it is indeed the case that the Chinese language "lacks grammatical precision," then what on earth could that Chinese "analytic sophistication," that Chinese "logic" be? If we accept that the development of (Western?) philosophical logic is the consequence of a peculiar allegiance to Aristotle's emphasis on the validity of "arguments" as a function of form and also agree that Chinese as a language *lacks* a precise grammatical form, then does it not follow that Chinese logic is theoretically impossible, except perhaps as some form of multi-valued logic, something which would be, at any rate, theoretically *distinct* from what is considered to be logic in the West?

Brannigan's problems again lie in his intuitions, this time his intuitions about language. Here, he conflates "language" and "writing" when, had he been more careful, he might have remembered Saussure's claim that "Language and writing are two distinct systems of signs; the second exists for the sole purpose of representing the first."[9] Brannigan's "therefore" completely denies the idea that "language" might be anything other than a system of *writing*. We see again Brannigan's adherence to the

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[7] Michael Brannigan, *The Pulse of Wisdom*, (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1995), p. 4.
[8] Michael Brannigan, *The Pulse of Wisdom*, (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1995), p. 4.
[9] Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), p. 23.

epistemological superiority of the perspective of the exterior, whereby not having *lived* the language, experienced it "from the inside," he nonetheless makes claims as to its essence (here "precision") from the point of view of the supposedly objective investigator. Indeed, the obvious question arises when we recall that he emphasizes the cognitive importance of apprehending the "experiential context" in coming to terms with Asian thought. We would want to know, at this point in our inquiry, whether or not he actually *speaks* Chinese. For how else could he claim that Chinese "lacks grammatical precision?"

This interlude, into a text significant only because it provides a clear example of the underlying assumptions of cultural difference which ground excursions into "comparative" philosophy, raises the question of the perspective afforded by Chinese philosophy, for at the foundation of Brannigan's account is the experiential *difference* between the philosophies of West and East. We have been asked to accept the difference in philosophical perspective based solely on the "fact" that these are philosophies produced and promulgated by people who are *not us.* In other words, the only conceptual basis given for the difference in philosophies is the fact that the labels "Western" and "Asian" refer to the philosophies of other people who belong to different cultures.[10] Given the audience of the text, there is no guarantee that its readers will have ever "walked in the shoes" or spoken the languages of those whom it claims to present.

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[10] The linguistic difference here is also understood along the cultural divide, for Brannigan constructs Chinese as an *experiential* language. Although it is unclear what a non-experiential language is (mathematics? chemical notation? English?) the identification of the "ideographs" of Chinese as grounded in experience marks the situation of the linguistic difference within the lived experiences, and thus the *culture,* of the unfamiliar lives of cultural others.

Indeed, the result of this assumption is the hermeneutic foreclosure of the text's explicit goal: understanding the philosophies of cultural others.

With the difficulties generated by the insistence upon the cultural divide and its attribution to certain subsets of human groups, why preserve the distinction as it stands? Might it not be preferable to attempt to recast the standard classificatory schematics of culture along other, less problematic lines? We are thus returned to our question of the very function of this classificatory scheme of culture— what purpose does it serve? For our present concern, we could delimit the scope of this question to address solely the field of philosophy and recast it thus: how does the preservation of a distinction between cultures function in the field of philosophy? Why would it be necessary to maintain cultural distinctiveness and is it unavoidable?

It might now prove fruitful to examine specific examples of the functionality of the Chinese signifier in the texts and philosophical structures of "Western" thinkers who maintain the structural rigidity of the cultural divide. Consequently, I wish now to explore the deployment of "Chineseness" in the thought of Foucault and Nietzsche. In Foucault, we will discover the utility of the confrontation with a radically foreign other, echoing something similar in the work of Nietzsche. For in both Foucault and Nietzsche, we encounter something which could be described as the theoretical functionality of the Chinese signifier. In other words, the role that is to be played by "China" in their thought is one whereby China "marks" a privileged perspective from which to objectively survey, from without, the entirety of Western thought. Indeed, we might even question whether "China" in Foucauldian and Nietzschean parlance need necessarily refer to some materially existent culture and people. Since what is theoretically required is simply a

foreign perspective, they might just as well have chosen the perspective of extraterrestrial beings. Although the reason for selecting this perspective might lie in the fact that these aliens would be nothing at all like us, possessing not even a minimal level of humanness, we might ask here whether the common humanity accorded the Chinese does, in fact, bring them any closer to us humans in the West.

3.3 Foucauldian Laughter

Foucault writes in the preface to *The Order of Things* that his book was born out of "a laughter that shattered... all the familiar landmarks of my thought— *our* thought."[11] The source of this mirth of destabilization, Foucault tells us, was a passage from Borges which recreated a table of categories from "a certain Chinese encyclopedia," a table which ordered the multiplicity of animal life into such seemingly absurd and biologically useless categories as animals which "belong to the Emperor," or which are "included in the present classification," or which "from a long distance off look like flies."[12] Furthermore, there is an uneasiness in this laughter which has its roots in the fact that Borges locates this foreign classificatory scheme in the "mythical" lands of China. For indeed:

> In our dreamworld, is not China precisely this privileged *site* of *space*? In our traditional imagery, the Chinese culture is the most meticulous, the most rigidly ordered, the one most deaf to temporal events, most attached to the pure delineation of space.... There would appear to be, then, at the other end of the world we inhabit, a culture entirely devoted to the ordering of space, but one that does not distribute the multiplicity of existing things into any of the categories that make it possible for us to name, speak, and think.[13]

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[11] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, (New York: Vintage, 1970), p. xv.
[12] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, (New York: Vintage, 1970), p. xv.
[13] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, (New York: Vintage, 1970), p. xix.

It is therefore this very absurdity of those nonsensical *Chinese* categories which leads Foucault to question the *West's* "*a priori*," the grounds on which *Western* thought is systematized, ordered, classified, and made possible. This species of *a priori*, Foucault contends, allows for the production of knowledge precisely because its objective status is unquestioned. Thus, from the fact that Foucault sees that "there would appear to be" a culture whose categories for classification and the production of knowledge are understood to be and recognized as arbitrary, Foucault is driven to a Nietzschean laughter as he simultaneously recognizes the impossibility of the Western *a priori*'s unquestionability.

But despite the fruitfulness of Foucault's laughter and subsequent philosophical enterprise, there nonetheless remains for *him* an unthought here, namely, the very gulf of incommensurability between China and the West which first enabled him to perceive in a burst of laughter the arbitrariness of Western knowledge: the fact that "there would appear to be" a culture radically foreign and incomprehensible to us, situated at the other end of the world. For how are we to understand the fact that to Foucault *there would appear to be* (not "*is*") a culture "at the other extremity of the world we inhabit" which "does not distribute the multiplicity of existing things into any of the categories which make it possible for us to name, speak, and think?" Who is it that comprises this "we" to whom the Chinese seem so incomprehensible, so epistemologically and ontologically distant? Why would "we" be so predisposed to think in these terms, in terms of an "us" and "our thought" as opposed to "them and "their thought?" Are "they" who occupy the position of the inscrutable "China" fictitious beings, produced from the discursive effects

of the "would appear to be," and thus lacking the solidity of the "real" existence "we" possess?

Given the project which Foucault sets for himself in *The Order of Things*, that of an inquiry into the conditions of possibility for the emergence of *Western* knowledge and theory, it would seem that the unasked question here resolves into something like the following: what are the conditions of possibility for the emergence of a knowledge about China and the Chinese? What is the historical *a priori* at work behind this seemingly facile distinction? Why would there ever have appeared to "us" the idea of a culture so distant, so incomprehensible, so incommensurable with "our" own?

I have already suggested that it is the very fact of a presupposed radical alienness of a "Chinese" system of ordering which renders visible to Foucault the arbitrariness of "Western" categories of knowledge, but we see too that China's location "at the other extremity of the world we inhabit" marks its ontological separation as well; the Chinese are not only distant from the "us" in the "West" epistemologically. For since they inhabit the other extremity of the world, they are perhaps consequently radically different, Chinese *beings*. Whether or not there actually exists such a thing as a "Chinese being" is not the issue. What is at stake are the fossilized mechanisms of a certain historical logic which delimits the realm of possible meanings of China and Chineseness in order that it might possess a peculiar *utility* for "us," here at the other end of the world, an imagined usefulness for understanding "ourselves" and "our thought."

Curiously then, the founder of contemporary discourse theory, which has yielded many strategic and politically useful insights, is here blind to the profoundly political

positioning of his own philosophical endeavor. Gayatri Spivak, in "Can the Subaltern Speak?", poses the question of Foucault's politics in the following manner:

> Although Foucault is a brilliant thinker of power-in-spacing, the awareness of the topographic reinscription of imperialism does not inform his presuppositions. He is taken in by the restricted version of the West produced by that reinscription and thus helps to consolidate its effects.... The clinic, the asylum, the prison, the university, seem screen-allegories that foreclose a reading of the broader narratives of imperialism.[14]

Although Foucault recognizes that there is a vested political interest in the production of knowledge, he has not seen his own complicity in the political discourses of the West. Thus, his *usage* of the cultural other is here suspect, overwritten perhaps with the historical legacy of an imperialist past which conceals the "unthought" of a facile differentiation made between the cultural spaces of West and East.

In fact, his assumptions about culture and its functions are even more problematic, as when on the next page he attempts to produce the theoretical ground which he will attempt to capture in the analyses of *The Order of Things*. Here, he draws a distinction between the "fundamental codes of a culture," those schemata which govern languages, perceptions, exchanges, and so forth, and the "scientific theories and philosophical interpretations" which serve as juridical mechanisms to establish the verity of the fundamental codes. But in between these two extremes, Foucault claims, there is a nebulous middle ground wherein "...a culture, imperceptibly deviating from the empirical orders prescribed for it by its primary codes... frees itself sufficiently enough to discover that these orders are perhaps not the only possible ones or the best ones; this culture then finds itself faced with the stark fact that... order *exists*."[15]

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[14] Gayatri Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" p. 84.
[15] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, (New York: Vintage, 1970), p. xx.

My quarrel here is not with his claim that this middle ground between cultural codings and their legitimization in the fields of science and philosophy exist as the very space of order, but rather with the peculiar wording which seems to attribute to "culture" a sort of consciousness on the order of individual subjectivity. In other words, in his phrasing, culture becomes understood as something primary, something on the order of the liberal conception of the individual within society. Each culture possesses its own codes and might reach a point where it recognizes the limitations of these codes, whether it is in the conflict with an other, or with itself. So far so good. This conception of culture is similar to that developed in the previous chapter with reference to Lacan. But what would generate, in the Foucauldian case, the dissonance necessary for a culture to begin to "free itself?" Why would a culture ever begin to think it necessary to free itself from its own regulatory codes? Is it simply the fact of contact with an other cultural code which presents possibilities hitherto unimaginable? If so, then cultural difference is theoretically necessary as the dialectic of cultural change, a dialectic grounded, I would argue, in the *desires* of the individuals who comprise that culture.

But it is the desire of the individuals who inhabit culture which remains unaddressed in Foucault's neostructuralist account. The failure to acknowledge the presence of the individual desire to be the embodiment of a particular culture produces a conception of culture wherein individuals fulfill their roles with all the regularity of the gears and wheels of a machine. Where, then, does the "consciousness" which Foucault seems to attribute to a culture arise? How does a *culture* become aware of itself, if not for the individuals comprising it sensing that something "isn't quite right?"

In this context, then, the Foucauldian position is clear: although Foucault quite astutely describes the modes of epistemological production within the West, the strength of his analysis is seriously compromised by the fact that he leaves unexamined the notion of a culture as a strangely self-conscious, monolithic, homogeneous entity, as well as the imperialist imagination which underwrites the modernist experience of cultural alterity. Foucault's conceptualization of the human sciences as founded upon a notion of man which had to be discursively produced and which is thus far from being a universal fact of nature is theoretically and politically incomplete. What is lacking, then, is the work supplied by much of contemporary postcolonialist theory— the fact that the discursive notion of the universal "human" subject is enabled by its conceptual grounding on the notion of cultural others and the critical reworking of the concept of culture. In Foucault's case, it is this very dreamworld of imagination wherein the cultural others inhabit geographical spaces on the other side of the planet that provides him with the critical distance necessary for his project. Western theory needs its others as the precondition for its own existence.

But has this always been the case? Should we simply add this usage of the cultural other to the long list of evils associated with the phenomena of empire-building in the colonial era and applaud ourselves for our deft analytical skills? It might be suggested that this functioning of the cultural other is merely an aftereffect of the ways in which the social spaces of hitherto relatively non-interfused social spaces violently collided in the age of imperial conquest. But it seems that we really do not have enough data on the matter to render a definitive judgment. Thus, let us examine the functionality of the space of the Chinese other in the work of Nietzsche, for although Nietzsche is far

from explicit in his political philosophy, his work in the critique of culture might provide useful insights into our problem.

3.4 Nietzsche's "Asiatic" Eye

From the vast amount of writings Nietzsche left behind, we find these two curious statements with which to continue our investigation. First, he writes in 1884: "I must learn to think more *orientally* about philosophy and knowledge. An *oriental* overview of Europe,"[16] and he asks in 1886 in *Beyond Good and Evil*: "...whoever has really, with an Asiatic and supra-Asiatic eye, looked into, down into the most world-denying of all possible ways of thinking...."[17] Within the contemporary terms with which "Oriental" thought is popularly viewed, Nietzsche's comments here might seem to be only a rather banal variant of that Orientalist stance popular with those dreamier practitioners of "Western" philosophy, an epistemological orientation which seeks to juxtapose what is understood to be the destructive and mechanistic "rational" modes of Western thought against the more "life-affirming" and ethical modes of thought understood to be characteristic of what is generally named "Eastern Philosophy." But what is the difficulty with this? Do not these Eastern philosophies, these products of Oriental minds, contrast sharply with philosophy as it is understood in the West? Is there not some sense to this division of human thought into the poles, East and West? Is there not, after all, a kernel of truth to this binary opposition?

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[16] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Kritische Studienausgabe*, Colli and Montinari, eds., 11:26, p. 317.
[17] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, R. J. Hollingdale, trans., (New York: Penguin, 1972), §56.

But apart from the facile bifurcation of the cultures of the world into West and East, there is also the matter of the *perspective* which is advocated here. Nietzsche seems to be suggesting that there is an alternative to European modes of thought, distinctively different worldviews to be found in the perspective of the Oriental. Given that one of Nietzsche's philosophical projects is the advocacy of a different perspective, indeed, that truth and value are themselves matters of perspective, what lies behind the advocacy of the perspective of the Asiatic? Indeed, if Nietzsche believed that the best manner in which to carry out a ruthless critique of the values of one's society was to adopt the highest possible perspective, that which afforded the clearest view of that which exists in a given society, then is there not here the suggestion that the Asiatic perspective is (until the development of the "supra-Asiatic eye," of course) at least *higher* than the perspective of the European?[18]

Setting these questions aside for the moment, however, we might further argue that what these Nietzschean statements reveal is also a certain *functionality*, whereby Asia qua signifier derives its significatory power from its ability to serve either as an antidote, a philosophical corrective to the various theoretical diseases of the West, or as its stark opposite, throwing the contours of Western thought into sharp relief. In either case, the Asian signifier designates something which is always already conceptualized as the manifestation of a pure difference located along cultural trajectories. Thus, it makes no difference what the actual content of the term "Asia" or "China" is, so long as that

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[18] Assuming, of course, that Nietzsche intends the development of the perspective of the Asiatic eye as the basis for the launching of a critique of European (French, German, and so on) cultures.

term can be usefully counterposed against the philosophical, social, or cultural Western systems one wishes to critique. Or to put it yet another way, I am suggesting that it is only by being conceptualized *a priori* as *non*-West that "Asia" or "China" can supplement the West, fill its "lack." Thus, it is not so much the fact that "Asia" or "China" is "simply" a discursive fiction, emergent from the Western Orientalist discursive machine, but rather what is at stake in the assertion of a cultural difference between the two is the *function* of a peculiar, "Oriental" signifier which exists in the discourses of *both* East and West.[19] This "Orientalist" function (if it still makes sense to call it that) is subtly intertwined with the notion of cultural difference, theoretically grounded upon a faith in the *a priori separation* between two incommensurable cultural spaces. A closer examination of the function of "China" in Nietzsche's texts will serve to further clarify this line of argument.

Nietzsche utilizes "Chinese" as an aesthetic adjective twice in the last section of *Beyond Good and Evil*. Both times, it serves to mark the expression of an artistic impulse that succeeds only in capturing that which is "on the verge of withering and losing its fragrance!"[20] In the first instance, Nietzsche locates Mozart with his "childlike delight in curlicues and Chinese touches" at the death of a particular mode of musical expression, one which resounded "the last chord of a centuries-old great European

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[19] This "Oriental" signifier functions within "Eastern" thought by utilizing an assumed homogeneous philosophy of the "West" as a means of coming to terms with, and in fact, *(re)inventing*, itself. Witness, for example, the scathing critiques launched upon Confucian tradition in the early twentieth century where, for some revolutionary or progressive groups, complete Westernization was the solution to what became viewed as an outmoded and stale Chinese Confucianism.

[20] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, R. J. Hollingdale, trans., (New York: Penguin, 1972), §296.

taste."[21] In the second instance, Nietzsche speaks, as he often does, to a "we" (which could either be himself or the community of philosophers who, along with Nietzsche, recognize in their times the degeneration of the once-noble human spirit), but this is a peculiar "we." That is, the group with which Nietzsche seems to identify himself is "we mandarins with Chinese brushes." Nietzsche's "Chinese" gesture thus consists of, in a fashion similar to Mozart, the writing and capturing of ideas which will soon be incomprehensible. As a philosophical "mandarin," he represents philosophy's swan song at the close of a decadent age.

If this were all that there were to Nietzsche's appropriation and utilization of "Chinese"-ness, then there might be no problem, for we might understand it as simply metaphorical. But taken in the context of the remainder of Nietzsche's references to China and the Chinese, we are faced here with what seems to be a paradoxical attitude. That is, if Nietzsche believes himself to be a "mandarin with Chinese brushes," then what are we to make of the fact that he diagnoses European culture of his time as "...becom[ing] thinner, more good-natured, more prudent, more comfortable, more mediocre, more indifferent, more Chinese, more Christian...?"[22] In fact, if "Chineseness" is synonymous for Nietzsche with "ossification," "physiological regression," "smallness" of heart, "castration," "desiccated... stagnation," and so on,[23]

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[21] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, R. J. Hollingdale, trans., (New York: Penguin, 1972), §245.
[22] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Walter Kaufmann, trans., (Vintage: New York, 1967), I, §12.
[23] See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* Walter Kaufmann, trans., (New York: Vintage, 1967), §127, §129, §395, §866; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, R. J. Hollingdale, trans., (New York: Penguin, 1972), §267; Friedrich Nietzsche, "Why I am a Destiny," *Ecce Homo*, Walter Kaufmann, trans., (New York: Vintage 1967), §4.

and we couple to this view of the Chinese as the archetypal "herd animal" Nietzsche's understanding of culture as "above all, unity of style in all the expressions of the life of a people,"[24] then what sense does it make at all to imagine that Nietzsche considered *himself* to be "a mandarin with Chinese brushes?" Why would Nietzsche resort to this particular self-descriptive metaphor, one based in a culture he seemingly disparages, especially when he calls Kant, one of his many philosophical targets, "the great Chinaman of Konigsberg?"[25]

The simple response to this might be that since Nietzsche differentiates between "culture" and "genuine culture,"[26] this double sense of culture is at play in his use of "Chinese." In other words, apropos of the fashion in which he advocates the development of a *truly* German culture in the face of what *passes* for German culture, his appropriation of the Chinese brush signals a similar assault on the decadent "leveling" culture of the Chinese. Actually, one might be able to extend this reading further, by developing a Nietzschean critique of the Confucian "slave revolt in morality." That is, one could produce a reading of the Confucian terms *jun zi* and *xiao ren*[27] which attacks

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[24] Friedrich Nietzsche, "David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer," *Untimely Meditations*, R. J. Hollingdale, trans., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), §1.

[25] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, R. J. Hollingdale, trans., (New York: Penguin, 1972), §210.

[26] See Robert John Ackermann, *Nietzsche: A Frenzied Look*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990). Chapter two provides a close reading of Nietzsche on culture, based on the essay on David Strauss in *Untimely Meditations*.

[27] Part of the revolutionary impact of Confucian thought can be argued to lie in the fact that Confucius revalues the terms, *jun zi* and *xiao ren,* terms which originally refer to station (i.e. "prince" and "small man," by insisting that one can be a *jun zi* even if one is not a member of the nobility. To qualify as a *jun zi,* one must possess the moral qualities which characterize the *jun zi;* it is not sufficient (or even necessary) to be of noble birth.

Confucius for imbuing the original valuations of these terms with moral content. In other words, by infusing *jun zi* or "prince" and *xiao ren* or "small/petty man," terms which refer to a social rank and position, with a *moral* and *ethical* sense, Confucius has performed precisely a slave revolt in morality homologous to Christianity's revaluation of "good." Furthermore, since Nietzsche seems to believe that a critique of the foundations of a society is best developed from the outside, *from the perspective of a foreigner*, he is ideally suited to perform this evaluation of Chinese culture, is he not?

It is difficult, if not impossible, however, to see how Nietzsche could seriously have intended this critique of a culture about which he knew very little, if anything at all. Indeed, his knowledge of "the Orient" was primarily limited to Indian philosophy and Mahayana Buddhism,[28] and even these were sketchy subjects for him. What we are perhaps left with then, is the functionality of "Chineseness," something very much like the manner in which the terms "Asia" and "Orient" function in the pair of remarks at the beginning of this section, in which "Chinese" functions as the space of an artificial perspective from which Nietzsche can, as a stranger in a strange land, gain distance from his own, European culture in order to diagnose its ills. In the specific case of the diagnosis of German culture, Nietzsche writes that although the learned German classes could not imagine that their own culture, "the ripest and fairest fruit of its age," is in fact, quite decadent, there is nonetheless an external position from which one can gain insight into its nature. He writes, "The more cautious observer, *especially if he is a foreigner*,

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[28] See Johann Figl, "Nietzsche's Early Encounters with Asian Thought," *Nietzsche and Asian Thought*, Graham Parkes, ed., (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), pp. 51-63.

cannot help noticing that what the German scholar now calls his culture and that jubilant culture of the new German classics differ from one another only in the extent of their knowledge... [emphasis added]."[29] Thus, if one is to successfully work to transform the value tables which govern a given "culture," the only position which the theorist can adopt is that of the externally positioned foreigner. It is in this mode, then, that he can write in *The Gay Science*, for example, that:

> China, for example, is a country in which large-scale dissatisfaction and the capacity for *change* have become extinct centuries ago; and the socialists and state idolaters of Europe with their measures for making life easier and safer might easily establish in Europe, too, Chinese conditions and a Chinese "happiness," if only they could first extirpate the sicklier, tenderer, more feminine dissatisfaction and romanticism that at present are still superabundant here.[30]

Here, Nietzsche's cultural critique requires a "leap to China" made both spatially and temporally, in the comparison between the Chinese of "centuries ago" and the present of Europe. The comparison of Europe to China and the power of this criticism of European culture is rooted in the *difference* between the two. The suggestion that China, which at this time was at the military mercy of Europe, was in fact *stronger than* Europe might have compelled a reader at the time to think more carefully about the supposed superiority of European culture.

But if it is the case that China and the Chinese are necessary to Nietzsche primarily for the function they play, for the fact that the extreme foreign-ness of Chinese

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[29] Friedrich Nietzsche, "David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer," *Untimely Meditations*, R. J. Hollingdale, trans., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), §1.

[30] Friedrich Nietzsche, "David Strauss, the Confessor and the Writer," *Untimely Meditations*, R. J. Hollingdale, trans., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), §24.

culture serves as perspectival distance from European culture, then what is important here is not *content*, but *form*. It is unnecessary for Nietzsche to "get China right"; what *is* necessary is that China lie on the "other side of the world," that China and the Chinese be maintained and understood as a distinct and independent cultural system outside of Europe.[31]

Chinese thought, or Chinese "Philosophy," which Nietzsche almost never addresses (with the exception of passing references to "Lao Tse" and Confucius in *The Antichrist*, *Twilight of the Idols*, and *The Will to Power*[32]) is thus necessarily located outside of the sphere of Western thought. Western and Chinese thought can only be understood as distinct systems which might be compared or contrasted, since each possesses independent and non-related constitutive principles which capture in a distilled form the essence of that cultural system. Thus, while the West is seemingly forever trying on different political forms, China represents the insistent and unchanging adherence to a single, unalterable political structure. If the West is seen as homogeneously dedicated to the principles of scientific observation and discovery, then

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[31] Perhaps this explains why so many texts attempting to relate Nietzsche to Chinese thought possess the same tedious structure, i.e. "Here is some aspect of Nietzsche's thought. Here is some aspect of X's thought (where X represents the Chinese thinker under consideration). These are the similarities. These are the differences."

[32] In these instances, Nietzsche treats Chinese thought as simply another item in a list, as when in *The Twilight of the Idols* he writes: "Neither Manu nor Plato nor Confucius nor the Jewish and Christian teachers have ever doubted their *right* to lie." In *The Antichrist* the usage is similar, when he proclaims that the "anti-realist", searching for the experience of a life unsullied by expression in language and signs would, "among Indians... availed himself of Sankhya concepts; among the Chinese, of those of Lao-tse— without having felt any difference." In the first case here, more interestingly than in the second, one gets the feeling that Nietzsche is after something universal, perhaps the expression of a fundamental will to power which transcends the specificity of culture.

China is similarly devoted to modes of thought which stress the immanence of things and not the development of transcendent ordering principles. Thus, in addition to being radically foreign to the West, the unchanging style of Chinese culture and thought provides a *stable* point of reference, from which Nietzsche may survey the changes which European culture is undergoing. Given that China "never changes," one can glean an understanding of European "civilization" by contrasting the vicissitudes of its historical forms with the "durability" of the Chinese.[33]

It is interesting, then, to note that those Chinese thinkers who accepted or utilized Nietzsche, particularly those of the early 1920s, were focused on prescribing the antidote to the stagnation of Confucian culture, an antidote developed by *adopting the perspective of the West.* In other words, this intuitive reading of the relative differences between cultures is simply accepted *tout court* as an accurate analysis of social facts, and not as the predispositions of a certain perspective. For example, this West=change/China=stagnation dichotomy is adopted as part of the culture critique mounted by Li Shicen and Lu Xun,[34] who attempted to throw off the dead weight of centuries of Confucian culture as an impediment to the development of China as a "modern" nation. Li, for one, writes:

> I am not an advocate of Nietzsche, but after close consideration of his thought, I cannot but admit its real value. We Chinese, due to our

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[33] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, Walter Kaufmann, trans., (New York: Vintage, 1967), §90.

[34] Both men were leading figures in the "May Fourth" incident in 1919, which is generally considered to mark the beginning of the drive to transform and recreate Chinese culture by actively pursuing and promulgating the development and practice of Western ideas. Lu Xun is primarily known for his highly satirical stories, written in (the then revolutionary) *baihua* (ordinary language, as opposed to the complex, stilted styles of classical Chinese).

> phlegmatic disposition, have been despised by the peoples of other countries. Lacking the courage to advance and deficient in creativity, we are docile slaves of custom, merely out of cringing timidity. Bringing up such docile slaves is a waste of the country's money, giving birth to them is a waste of the race's energy. I suggest that we might perhaps find the salvation of these phlegmatic vassals in the thought of Nietzsche, who is so reviled, abused and refuted by our countrymen.[35]

Both Li Shicen and Lu Xun used a Nietzschean perspective as the vantage point from which they hoped to forcefully vault China into modernity, from which it had until then both excluded itself and been excluded. Nietzsche, who had used Chinese culture as a point from which to critique Western culture, is thus reconfigured by them to serve as the appropriate point from which to critique Chinese culture. In both the Chinese and Western cases what imparts momentum to the moment of self-critique is the assumption of the position of the radically foreign. By means of seeing one's self *as though one were a foreigner,* a certain distance necessary for the successful execution of the self-diagnostic is thereby attained.

But what is preserved in this type of theoretical maneuver, despite the reorientation of "cultural" perspectives, is a fundamental ontological split between cultures. Even though Nietzsche is seen as a means of transforming Chinese culture, the manner in which he is utilized is strictly homologous with the contemporary Western fascination with the "non-mechanistic" philosophies of the East. That is to say, the invisible and unbridgeable difference between the cultures of the West and of China is strictly maintained as a fundamental fact, as unquestionable as the claim that a pigeon is

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[35] Li Shicen, *Li Shicen lunwen ji* [Collected Essays of Li Shicen], as cited in David A. Kelly, "Nietzsche and the Chinese Mind," *Nietzsche and Asian Thought*, Graham Parkes, ed., (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), pp. 156-157.

not a hawk. Since the West is assumed to have always already been modern, Chinese culture is always situated in a position of backward powerlessness, from which it can only escape by being more Western than the West.[36] For the propagators of the May Fourth movement, what served as a restorative force in Chinese culture, then, was the complete repudiation and dismantling of traditional Chinese culture, the destruction of the ancient idols of Chinese society. Nietzsche's reading of China as an ossified, stagnant culture is accepted as accurate— in order for China to escape the unbearable weight of its own "centuries-old stagnation" the only solution is Westernization, the conscious adoption and absorption of the Western cultural principle of change.

Is this the solution, though? Is Nietzsche's assessment of Chinese culture correct? Could it be possible that *any* society has gone unchanged for centuries? China of Nietzsche's time was surely *different* from China of the thirteenth century. What serves as the index for evaluating the amount of change a "culture" has undergone? Nietzsche certainly prides himself on the ability to perceive across long periods of history, as in his declamation that the Christian slave revolt in morality was the result of a "centuries-old struggle."[37] But the point here is that the evaluation of societal change is accomplished with the theoretical tool of a certain perspective which, given the

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[36] Li Shicen, that cautious advocate for the adoption of Nietzschean thought, writes for example that "the ineptitude, impotence and pitiable complacency of the Chinese is beyond remedy...." *Chaoren zhexue qianshuo* [Outline of the Philosophy of the Superman], as quoted in David A. Kelly, "Nietzsche and the Chinese Mind," *Nietzsche and Asian Thought*, Graham Parkes, ed., (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991), p. 158. Given this description of the character of the Chinese and his advocacy of Nietzsche cited above, the only conclusion can be that this "impotence" needs the infusion of Western ideas and energy to restore it to power.

[37] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals*, Walter Kaufmann, trans., (Vintage: New York: 1967), I, §16.

presumed, underlying differences between cultures, need not be applicable to the culture under examination.[38] Thus, Nietzsche can perhaps be understood as a perpetuator of a particular conception of China, one in which the Confucian tradition is understood as freezing Chinese culture into a particular configuration. What I want to suggest, then, is that what he produces in his scattered remarks about the Chinese is not so much an accurate picture of the Chinese, but rather a cultural critique firmly grounded in the idea of cultural separation, marked here by change or the lack thereof. What marks China and the Chinese is an absolute lack of change, which is instead the guiding societal principle within Western cultures. Although Nietzsche utilizes the notion of cultural difference in a fashion dissimilar to other theorists we will examine, the fact remains that his philosophical perspectivalism *necessitates* an ontological difference. The fact that he chooses "the East" as this utterly foreign perspective is perhaps simply a mirroring of notions of culture already prevalent in his time. The end result is still, of course, the absoluteness of cultural difference, a mirroring of the classic claim that, of course, *they* are different from *us*.

But just how are "they" different? In the case of Nietzsche, we might be able to argue that the difference of the Chinese is only the result of the theoretical necessity of an external viewpoint located outside of Europe. But as suggested earlier, this necessity is not simply one of theoretical necessity, for it could easily be argued that there does exist certain unavoidable differences between the Chinese and the West. If Nietzsche has

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[38] Granted, there is here the question of the "higher" perspective, in that one could claim that what Nietzsche sees, he sees from a higher perspective. As a preliminary response, I can only ask but what means the "higher" perspective is justified. From what perspective is this the "higher" point of view?

utilized the vantage point of a culture completely different from his own, positioned at the far edges of the European cartographical imagination, there is nonetheless what presents itself as a *fact* of cultural difference. For Nietzsche, we could understand this fact as grounded in the expression of a distinctly *Chinese* style of life— the difference between us and them thus consists of the differences which exist between their lives and ours. But this would be quite the paradox, for the "grandfather of postmodernism" to be claiming that there existed something resembling some form of cultural *essence*. So what is it, apart from the pure contingency of geography, that constitutes this Chineseness?

3.5 Interlude: Chinese Essences

What could this be, this Chinese essence? For if we could clearly establish its contours, then we would have resolved the question of other cultures once and for all: "*they* are different from *us* because *they* are like this...." There have been many attempts to identify this essence, and any perusal of the "Chinese" philosophy section of a library will suffice to produce some of the salient features of this essence. One finds that Chinese culture is more "ethical"; it is more concerned with the immanental role of human beings within the world, and not with the discovery and delineation of transcendent first principles; it understands the cosmos as a working harmony and not as a machine to be taken apart, etc. But what these descriptions of the Chinese essence fail to take into account in their anxiousness to accurately detail the differences between West and East is the fact that philosophy is *not* a politically neutral endeavor, nor is it free from the historicity of meaning. The decision to interpret is not predicated upon some clear access to truth but is rather the result of a historical trajectory which is too easily forgotten. In the case of the difference between China and the West, what

historical possibilities exist for understanding this difference, and why are they possible? Which rejected historical practices of understanding the "Chinese" lie in the dusty past of the philosophical imagination? China and Chinese philosophy are *not* purely discursive fictions, but neither do they possess any sort of objective meaning or essence which can be unearthed vis-à-vis appeals to a "Chinese mind" or their "fundamentally Confucian nature." The very attempt to ground an understanding of China and Chinese philosophy, for example, upon the bedrock of Confucianism is part of the larger process of the sedimentation of historical meaning. Philosophical objectivity in the attempt to understand Chinese philosophy is impossible, not because the producers of these attempts are not "Chinese" in some sense or another, but because there is no philosophical escape from the historical. Philosophy itself is embedded within the historical, in such a way as to its make claims to a pure understanding of its "objects" of investigation theoretically and politically suspect. What is it that philosophy wants to avoid? What secret letters lie at the bottom of its ancient box of papers? This is not to say that Chinese philosophy does not exist, but rather that although Chinese philosophy does, in fact, exist, the manner in which we understand it, come to apprehend its meaning, and indeed, even label it as "philosophy," is arbitrary, subject to the constraint of a history too often denied in the process of adhering to one possibility of historical interpretation.

Let us examine one of the primary essential differences between the West and China, that of the peculiar Chinese *ethicality*. One of the grounds on which Chinese thought and Chineseness are differentiated from Western philosophy is the fact that it

tends to be focused on *ethics*,[39] due to its stronger concern with the immanental role of human beings within the world than in the investigation of the transcendental realm.[40] We read, for example, in Wang Gung-Hsing's *The Chinese Mind*, an odd little text which attempts to present an account of Chinese thought from the perspective of one who claims, above all else, to be Chinese, that what is predominant in Chinese thought is "our humanistic thinking," and if we "name anything Chinese, chances are that it is more or less linked with our moral perceptions."[41] In fact, Wang understands the transition

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[39] See, for example, texts ranging from Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China,* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922), especially chapter twelve, in which Russell "sums up the Chinese character," hoping that it may be possible to preserve "something of the ethical qualities in which China is supreme," p. 224, to James T. Bretzke, "The Tao of Confucian Virtue Ethics," *The International Philosophical Quarterly*, 35.1: pp. 25-41, in which we find the thesis that the "inscrutability" of the "Orient" comes from a misunderstanding of its fundamentally ethical character. Bretzke writes, for example, that "An ethics of virtue has been indisputably the predominant tradition in Confucian society [understood to be Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and societies "elsewhere"] and though the Occident may regard the Orient as inscrutable at times, clearly no one has ever credibly suggested that the latter is in a state of moral decay or chaos," p. 27. I have arbitrarily chosen these two examples, one from the distinguished Bertrand Russell, and the other from a contemporary philosopher, because these represent the general trend of attributing a fundamentally ethical character to the Orient and specifically China and the Chinese. Other examples of this phenomenon are quite easily found.

[40] This "distinction" between the theoretical foci of "Western" versus "Eastern" philosophy appears throughout the literature on Chinese philosophy and I will merely point out that it can be found prominently in the work of H. G. Creel, A. C. Graham, as well as numerous others. Curiously though, proponents of this distinction often fail to note that there existed a school of logicians in the Warring States period, who were hardly concerned, as is typical with logicians, with questions of ethics. Furthermore, the powerful political philosophy of legalism, which advocated the formulation of strict codes of law to regulate the populace is highly *amoral*, reading more like a scientific treatise on statecraft. But yet it is precisely this amoral political philosophy which became the ruling philosophy of the first Dynasty, with a continual presence up until the present.

[41] Wang Gung-Hsing, *The Chinese Mind*, (New York: Asia Press, 1946), p. 4.

from the "Confucian past" of Chinese history to the modern present as marked by a revaluation of Chinese ethics, for he suggests that:

> many Chinese patriots... argue that during the last one hundred years China has been suffering much at the hands of the imperialist powers. All this is due to the fact that we know less about science and technology than the West does. Hence, the Occident is 'advanced' while we are 'backward.' This might not have happened if Confucius had been less insistent in stressing that aside from the subject of virtuous living nothing is worth knowing. As it is, our scholars have been dominated so much by ethical motives in their search for knowledge that they are unable to see anything worth while beyond the moral horizon. Consequently the inventive genius of the Chinese race has been sidetracked, and of science and technology we know no more than our ancestors did in the days of yore.[42]

The claim that there exists something fundamentally more ethical about the Chinese is often supported with reference to the fact that in the wake of China's defeat by British cannons during the Opium War, many proponents of Westernization argued that what was needed were the superior armaments of the West, and *not* Western culture and its products. The ethicality of the Confucian tradition was thereby preserved. But is

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[42] Wang Gung-Hsing, *The Chinese Mind*, (New York: Asia Press, 1946), p. 25. Curiously, Wang Gung-Hsing's work raises another critical issue, for he both claims to be Chinese, and yet, as quoted, offers generalizations about the Chinese that might be seen *prima facie* as an example of an internalized orientalism. But does this explanation work? First, it suggests wrongly that there exists a truth about the situation which Wang's ideology-laden mind cannot penetrate, thus ignoring the fact that it is just as feasible to read Wang as working within the logic of orientalism to preserve the meaningfulness of what he perceives as "his" culture. In other words, we could read his comments about the essential characteristics of Chineseness as an attempt to resist its subordination within the matrix of West-China. Second, and most importantly, the internalized orientalism thesis misses the point that it itself supposes that Western theory is needed to rectify Wang's misunderstanding. "If only Wang were more postmodern!" The point to be made here is that the existence of the logic of a distinction between China and the West, between two different and opposed characters, is *itself* the problem. My work addresses this logic from the viewpoint of "Western theory," which is taken to be *separate* from something called a *Chinese* viewpoint. In order to complete the analysis, an understanding from the supposed "other side," from the point of view of the ontologically distinct "Chinese," is necessary.

it really necessary to argue that this desire, to preserve what one perceives as one's culture by a selective importation of ideas from the West, be grounded in an *essential* ethicality of the Chinese? If one loses a fistfight and remarks that one lost because of inferior physical strength and training, is this any justification for claiming that one is consequently more moral? The suggestion is that since what is desired are tools, instruments, and not the "mindset" or culture, one is therefore preserving one's culture intact; the Chinese essence will not be sullied and transformed by the simple addition of a nuclear arsenal. In the case of the Chinese, this "addition" of Western science might even produce what Bertrand Russell hopes will be "a genuinely new civilization, better than any that we in the West have been able to create."[43]

What happens, then, when this ethical essence becomes transformed? What happens when the Chinese "essence" changes to adapt to its times? It is in this context that a particular letter by Li Hung-Chang,[44] written to a friend, pleads the case of Westernization, as well as vents frustration at the seeming near-impossibility of this task

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[43] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China,* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922), p. 220.

[44] Li Hung-Chang, a curious figure in the politics of nineteenth century China, was born on the eve of the collapse of the Qin dynasty and the beginning of a period of intense "national" turmoil, and thus witnessed the collapse of the internal (to China) belief in the absolute superiority of the middle kingdom. He thus watched as the West utilized its superior weaponry and forces to compel China to enter the emerging global economy on the West's terms. As a result of the numerous Chinese defeats at the hands of the armies and navies of the West, he urged the "modernization" of China, not because he felt that the culture of the West was superior, but because he recognized the fact that the armaments of the West were unmatched by the Chinese. He was consequently a driving force behind the "self-strengthening movement" which began in 1871. This movement incorporated the formation of foreign language schools, the construction of gun factories, naval schools, and the development of extensive coal and iron mines. Ultimately, however, there was great opposition to modernization at all levels of the Chinese society of the period, and the movement failed in most of its goals. See especially chapter eleven of Immanuel C. Y. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

within the context of a generalized popular denial of the China-West imbalance of power in the late nineteenth century. It describes, among other things, his attempts to convince the existing government of the necessity of a rail system in staving off the "barbarian" invasion, and includes the following peculiar observation about his "fellow Chinese." He writes:

> The gentry class forbids the local people to use Western methods and machines, so that eventually the people will not be able to do anything.... Scholars and men of letters always criticize me for honoring strange knowledge and for being queer and unusual. *It is really difficult to understand the minds of some Chinese* [my emphasis].[45]

This last line, that "[i]t is really difficult to understand the minds of some Chinese," from a letter written almost one hundred years ago, contains within it echoes of the epistemological incommensurability between China and the West which I have already suggested derives from a philosophical orientalism— the naive, unquestioned assumption that China and Chinese thought are both distinct and radically foreign from the "familiar" experience of the West. Although there are numerous ways of reading this seemingly casual remark, one of these, which is difficult at best to defend as an interpretation of Li's statement, is *precisely* that which is often affirmed by Western philosophy as it examines Chinese philosophy. This reading understands the meaning of the statement as having to do with a sudden shift and discontinuity in Li's thought (and essence), so much so that Li is understood to be somehow *no longer Chinese*. Given that the old order of Confucian China has been forever lost, due to the gunboats and missionaries of the West, Li's mind has been transmogrified by a (corrupting)

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[45] Immanuel C. Y. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 290.

Westernizing influence so that in short, Li has become Western to such an extent that he cannot understand his fellow citizens. The West here represents a bizarre sort of cultural contagion, which replaces the natural, *more ethical* qualities of a "native" culture with a self-interested, scientific, rational, in short, *Western* mode of thought. In the context of the letter, it would seem that this reading, wherein Li's mind has been corrupted by the influence of the West and is thus no longer Chinese would be the least plausible, for how would it be possible to understand this sudden shift in being, this abrupt historical change of character? If it is indeed the case that the two poles of culture, China and the West, are as distinct as seems to be implied by the ease with which the distinction is made, then one is at least forced to argue that what has made the Western mode of thought so predominant is not the fact that it was ever "closer" to truth, but that it simply possessed adequate firepower to imprint its cultural superiority over those who had been historical unfortunate enough as to not have devised cannons and naval warships.

We are now perhaps at a point where we possess an understanding of the problematic status of a distinction which had seemed so easy to make, so intuitive and unassailable. The differentiation between the Chinese and the West is based upon neither objective history or simple "fact," but is instead predicated upon a certain, already existing mode of comprehending the Orient and imagining China. Thus, although Jonathan Spence[46] claims that Said overgeneralizes, leaving out in *Orientalism* "too much of the story," because:

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[46] The eminent historian who likes above all else to write works of history which incorporate original documents, narratives, and other information into peculiar literary narratives that renders him, according to *The Wall Street Journal*, "an expert explorer of the frontiers where European and Chinese minds me[e]t." See particularly his account of

> There have been so many twists and turns along the way to depicting China during the last four hundred years that no such broad generalization can hold. And that is at it should be. No one is easy to understand. And the more blurred and multifaceted our perceptions of China become, the closer we may be to that most elusive thing: the truth.[47]

Spence himself still maintains this faith in the possibility of a truth *about* China and the Chinese mind. In his hurry to defend himself from what he understands Said to be saying, namely, that historians such as himself are guilty of displaying a "patronizing and exploitative attitude toward Eastern civilizations," Spence completely misses the point of Said. Said is *not* concerned with rectifying a "patronizing and exploitative attitude," espousing instead a sort of universalizing "equal consideration of cultures." On the contrary, what I take to be the point of Said's work is the elaboration of the hitherto unseen process of historical production which "creates" the object we investigate and *identify as* an "Eastern civilization." Much as "native" populations are understood by clumsy anthropologists and sociologists as representing a crystalline relic of a primordial human culture, so too, China and "the Orient" represent and are restricted to "the other end of the world," far removed from the comfortable familiarity of our "own" world. It is not simply that there exists, on the one hand, "China and Chinese thought" and on the other, "the West and Western thought" which need to be treated *as equals* from a standard liberal point of view. Rather, what is contested is the very possibility of a relation of equals, given the historical fact of a certain mode of comprehending "China" and the "Orient."

John Hu, a converted Jesuit who traveled to France only to become incarcerated in an asylum for being seen as "mad" in *The Question of Hu*, (New York: Vintage, 1988).

[47] Jonathan Spence, "Western Perceptions of China From the Late Sixteenth Century to the Present," *Heritage of China: Contemporary Perspectives on Chinese Civilization*, Paul S. Ropp, ed., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 13-14.

Consequently, what is of crucial import in the investigation of the Chinese and Chinese philosophy is *not* the relatively simple matter of being less biased in our mindset, of attempting to treat them on an equal footing with the West. This view suggests that one can simply overcome historical inertia by clearing away the distorting cobwebs of "false beliefs" from one's mind, that it is possible to isolate what one thinks from the history within which one lives. It is precisely *not* a simple matter of equal rights, for in such a view, all that we need to alter in our "approach" to China and Chinese philosophy is some sort of unreflective predisposition, without any examination of what *remains* after one has theoretically "become more open-minded." What is missed in this conceptualization is precisely the point of Said's critique and of much of contemporary postcolonial theory, namely, the historical and philosophical grounds upon which we predicate our belief that there *must* exist fundamentally foreign, alien, different cultures from "our own" which can be neutrally investigated with whatever apparatus of knowledge we possess, anthropology, archaeology, sociology, philosophy, history, psychology, and so forth. It is a matter of equal rights *only if* one takes there to be radically incomprehensible and different cultures from our own, cultures which are inhabited by beings who think, act, and exist in a completely foreign way. Although this assumption might be seen as harmless, as somehow necessary to expanding our own self-conceptualizations, I want to argue next that even if it is such, this very assumption renders impossible, *in terms of its own logic*, any sort of "understanding" of the "other cultures." This discussion will thus return us to the second aspect of the assumption of cultural difference: the transformation of the other into an *object* of study. To

accomplish this, I want to focus on one specific text: Robert Allinson's "An Overview of the Chinese Mind," his introductory essay to *Understanding the Chinese Mind.*

3.6 Hybridity and the Problem of Other (Chinese) Minds

The very title of Allinson's text should suffice in itself, for given what has already been said, we can suspect what we are about to discover within its pages. The book itself is a rather typical collection of essays, all focused on Chinese philosophy, edited by Robert Allinson, a member of the philosophy department of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. If one subscribes to the logic of a necessary epistemological and ontological split between China and the West, then one would see that as a Westerner, *and* as a philosopher, Allinson is seemingly in a perfect position to write his introductory essay "An Overview of the Chinese Mind." Allinson speaks from a theoretical perspective from which it is possible for him, not only to attempt to provide an overview of the "Chinese mind," (which, given the existence of over a billion "Chinese minds" is rather remarkable) but without any significant examination of the historicity of this particular way of dividing the world.

Allinson's essay begins in rather straightforward fashion. He writes: "In our attempt to understand the Chinese mind, we must agree upon what we mean by 'understanding,' by 'the Chinese mind,' and by 'philosophy.'"[48] We make clear, with this properly philosophical beginning, that we do not assume we "know" what is meant by the major terms in our sentence and thus wish to set about clarifying these terms, producing arguments for some definitions and rejecting others, hopefully producing

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[48] Robert E. Allinson, "An Overview of the Chinese Mind," *Understanding the Chinese Mind*, Robert E. Allinson, ed., (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 1.

some philosophy at the end of the process. The "Chinese mind" here is simply some "object" like "knowledge" or "belief," which must be taken apart with philosophical implements and reconstructed and clarified so as to be meaningful. But there is more going on than just the application of a philosophical methodology, and there are more assumptions at work behind this statement than Allinson suspects. We read in the first few pages that the general assumptions and methodology of the book consist of the following:

> This volume is the outcome of a belief that the Chinese mind can be understood through its philosophy.... [It] is one of the first of its kind to set out to reveal how Chinese philosophy can be understood in light of the techniques and concepts taken from Western philosophy. In this respect, we may expand the mirror image to that of a mirror being looked at through another mirror. Classical Chinese philosophy is investigated with the intention of articulating philosophical terms and key concepts by comparing these terms and concepts with parallel terms and concepts developed in classical and contemporary Western philosophy. It is hoped that by presenting the philosophical roots of the Chinese mind in terms which are familiar to the Western reader that the Western reader can come to a better understanding of the Chinese philosophical tradition which has formed the Chinese mind, and hence to a better understanding of the Chinese mind."[49]

There is first of all the assumption, beneath these seemingly innocuous comments, that the Chinese mind is an *object to be studied*, that it can be understood as an object of inquiry by means of the Western philosophical method, read here as "analytic" philosophy.[50] Secondly, the philosophical methodology employed here is

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[49] Robert E. Allinson, "An Overview of the Chinese Mind," *Understanding the Chinese Mind*, Robert E. Allinson, ed., (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 1.

[50] Allinson's piece and all of the pieces in this book, with the exception of a piece by a professor of religion, could be called "analytic" philosophy because the philosophical methodology employed is generally employed by the Anglo-American school of philosophy. The question of the approach of other philosophical traditions to "Chinese" philosophy remains to be examined and I will not do so here. Instead I want only to point out that these other traditions are also guilty (to some extent) of philosophical

assumed to be *neutral with regard to its object*, and as such is capable only of producing value-free "truths" about Chinese philosophy. This imagined purity of the philosophical method not only takes the form of both an assumption that it is "free" from history, but also that of a conscious *disavowal* of the possibility of implication in the historical stain of imperialism. We later find, for example, statements such as: "In the end we are not cultural imperialists, we are dancing partners."[51] Allinson's argument here is roughly the following: though we may begin with our "crude" assumptions about the Chinese mind and about Chinese philosophy, by using (analytic) philosophy to understand the Chinese mind we end up fundamentally shifting our outlook so that we as "Western" become more "Chinese" in our thought while the "Chinese" becomes more "Western." Thus, it is a dance where no one is leading and the two halves/partners exist in perfect complementarity, each having become more of the other. In fact, Allinson writes later that "We are no longer purely Western or purely Eastern. We are all of us hybrids."[52]

But if this were true, if we took this metaphor seriously, then we might expect that the essays in this volume would reflect this, that they would ultimately be a strange new synthesis of ancient Chinese philosophy and contemporary Western philosophy. But regrettably, the text does not live up to the demands of its metaphor, for what we end up with is a series of articles which deploy the *method* of analytic philosophy to understand

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imperialism. The appropriation of "Maoism" as the true "socialism" by the disillusioned French left of the late 1960s is perhaps a striking example, but the problem in general requires more investigation than I have done here and it is not my design to specifically malign "analytic" philosophy.

[51] Robert E. Allinson, "An Overview of the Chinese Mind," *Understanding the Chinese Mind*, Robert E. Allinson, ed., (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 3.

[52] Robert E. Allinson, "An Overview of the Chinese Mind," *Understanding the Chinese Mind*, Robert E. Allinson, ed., (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 23.

the *object:* Chinese philosophy. From the lengthy quotation above, it is evident that Allinson holds that Western philosophy is capable of producing through careful deployment, an understanding of the Chinese mind, of producing some "truths" about what it *is*. There is no serious reflection at all on the fact that if one assumes, as Allinson does, that the "Chinese mind" and the "Western mind" are *distinct entities*, then there is no epistemological guarantee for the production of knowledge about *either*. That is to say, if one assumes that Chineseness and Westernness lie at the opposite ends of an ontological divide, it does not follow that the existence of a *means of communication* between the two is guaranteed. One might as well argue first that Martians are different from humans, but that nonetheless humans are capable of understanding and knowing the contents and contours of the "Martian mind."[53]

This maintained purity of the philosophical method is not a subtle and cunning imperialist "plot" hidden under many onionskin layers of ideology. Instead, its arrogance is fairly straightforward:

> It is entirely possible that ancient Chinese philosophy becomes *more* intelligible (rather than less) by the attempt to understand it through the viewpoints of contemporary Western philosophy. In fact, it may well be that such a model of understanding would make Chinese philosophy more theoretically understandable to the contemporary Chinese mind than it was to its ancient counterpart [emphasis in the original].[54]

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[53]The obvious retort to this counterexample is that, of course, Martians and humans are different entities, while Westerners and Chinese are both simply types of *human beings*. It is my contention, however, that the differentiation between Chinese and Western as typically found and historically mediated produces precisely this: *two different entities*.

[54] Robert E. Allinson, "An Overview of the Chinese Mind," *Understanding the Chinese Mind*, Robert E. Allinson, ed., (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 7.

Characteristic of an imperialist attitude, one which sees only the natives and not one's presence *in* "their culture," there is a fundamental blindness to the assumed position of power taken by the philosophical gumshoe hot on the trail of the Chinese mind. The question of whether or not the microscope *affects* the organism being studied is unasked and unanswered. "Contemporary Western philosophy," already a reduction since it obviously specifies a particular methodology as the whole of philosophy, is understood to be such a powerful tool that it can reveal, not only the Chinese mind to the Western gaze, but the Chinese mind *to itself*. Unlike Chinese philosophy, which is necessarily tied to a particular, non-universal viewpoint, *everyone* can understand the results produced by the neutral methods of Western philosophy.

Thus we return to the fact that "Chinese philosophy" *as an object of study* is created and given its theoretical contours by Western philosophy. We read for example that:

> ...the Chinese mind is not monolithic and... Chinese philosophy, rather than being simply a body of doctrines, is a dialogue between philosophers. It is not a matter of choosing "who is right" as it is a realization that the task of understanding is largely a work of interpretation, and that every act of interpretation that we perform alters and expands the object that we are attempting to understand. The proper result is that the Chinese mind grows under our fingertips as we attempt to understand it.[55]

And a little later we read that "What constitutes the Chinese mind is to some extent formed by our modes of investigation and our modes of investigation are in turn altered and expanded by our contacts with the Chinese mind."[56] What we find here is a

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[55] Robert E. Allinson, "An Overview of the Chinese Mind," *Understanding the Chinese Mind*, Robert E. Allinson, ed., (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 8.
[56] Robert E. Allinson, "An Overview of the Chinese Mind," *Understanding the Chinese Mind*, Robert E. Allinson, ed., (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 10.

simultaneous disavowal of "cultural imperialism" precisely while performing it. There is both the assertion that the Chinese mind is neither "monolithic" nor "essential" but what is posited by the investigation as its proper object is precisely the "Chinese mind" *in its essence*. Allinson writes, for example, that a debate between Hansen and Harbsmeier over the status of Gongsun Long's infamous White Horse dialogue is a debate as to "what constitutes the Chinese mind in its essence."[57] Moreover, this statement is coupled with the claim that the debate between Hansen and Harbsmeier is "an East-East debate," for "both sides can find the roots of their claims in Chinese culture."[58] Remarkably, by simply talking *about* Chinese philosophy, Hansen and Harbsmeier have undergone a transmogrification of essence; they are now located *within* that Chinese culture at the other end of the world.

Consequently, other than the fact that the philosophical gaze is now keenly focused on the "the Chinese mind," we see that it nonetheless remains the pure and unadulterated gaze of Western philosophy. The "Chinese mind" and the "Chinese philosophy" under scrutiny are not, however, quite so fortunate. They emerge reborn, glistening within the pure crystalline structures of "contemporary Western philosophy." *They* are now hybrids, strange creatures which are somehow both "Western" and "Chinese." Confucius is now taken to have had a semantic concept of truth, at least operatively; we have unearthed the Chinese axiology behind their ethical tradition. What is now different about the Western philosophical method, other than the fact that it has

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[57] Robert E. Allinson, "An Overview of the Chinese Mind," *Understanding the Chinese Mind*, Robert E. Allinson, ed., (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 8.
[58] Robert E. Allinson, "An Overview of the Chinese Mind," *Understanding the Chinese Mind*, Robert E. Allinson, ed., (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 9.

examined something it typically *does not investigate*? A cannon, even when it is aimed at different objects, *still remains a cannon*; a biologist, irrespective of the particular species she examines, *remains a biologist*. In order for Western philosophy to have altered as much as Allinson claims it does, far more is required than simply a different object of investigation. The patent absurdity of Allinson's claims about "becoming more Chinese might be illustrated with the following politically-charged comparison: Allinson might as well have argued that since the Nazis spoke of Jews and claimed that their understanding of the Jews came from an understanding of the essence of the "Jewish mind," that the Nazis were consequently more *Jewish*.

Thus, this peculiar *object* of our Western philosophical investigation, "Chinese" philosophy, appears to begin to recede from its cognitive reach. This does not mean that a Truth about Chinese philosophy has been revealed here. Rather, what we have seen is that there is something of a flaw in the methodology of Western philosophy when it purports to examine something it has already removed, ontologically and epistemologically, from the world it is purported to inhabit. The problems Allinson encounters are not emergent from the inherent resistance of the *object* to study, from the difficult, inscrutable nature of Chinese thought, but rather because he cannot see that he is caught within an imperialist mode of understanding that makes certain assumptions about the thought of the cultures it considers to be vastly different from itself. The more philosophy of the sort Allinson practices attempts to grasp Chinese philosophy "in its essence," the more impossible the task becomes. Let me cite from Allinson again to make this point clearer. He writes:

> As some of the chapters depict the Chinese mind as it has existed within a long, historical tradition, we must bear in mind that today, in many ways, the Chinese mind has become Westernized and is rapidly in the process of becoming more and more Westernized. This does not simply mean that Chinese people are now enjoying Western soft drinks and are wearing Western suits. From a philosophical point of view, what this means is that through contact with the West, many Chinese have come to value Western, proof-orientated thinking and, as a result, have lost the roots of their own tradition. *What this means is that a Chinese person may need to re-learn the ways of thinking of her or his own tradition in the same way as a Westerner must discover the roots of Chinese thought* [emphasis added].[59]

The fact that Allinson boldly asserts that Chinese philosophy is accessible for the "corrupted," Westernized Chinese only through Western philosophy amounts to little more than an arrogance about the prowess of "Western, proof-orientated thinking" and the assumption of the corruptibility of the Chinese (*not* the Western) mind. Who is leading in *this* dance? Is it not implausible to suggest that "a Chinese person may need to re-learn the ways of thinking of her or his own tradition in the same way as a Westerner must discover the roots of Chinese thought?" Is Western thought always transparent to its own, such that this form of cultural re-education is unnecessary? Could we imagine the sentiment above, but with the cultural positions reversed?

What this points to is precisely an insurmountable logic of *difference* between Western and Chinese thought, for one is either (purely) Chinese in thinking or one is a corrupted (Westernized) Chinese examining the Chinese mind. This difference renders impossible Allinson's hope that the Chinese might become Western while the Westerner became simultaneously Chinese. In this logic, we are one or the other, but not both. If it appears that we are, in fact, *hybrids*, it is only by virtue of a theoretical blindness to the

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[59] Robert E. Allinson, "An Overview of the Chinese Mind," *Understanding the Chinese Mind*, Robert E. Allinson, ed., (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 12.

relationship of China to the West. Only if we pretend that the fact of Western imperialism did not occur or that it is now irrelevant to our cultural interactions, philosophical or otherwise, do we arrive at the possibility that something like Allinson's hybrids might exist. Without this naiveté, we are left with an ineluctable *difference* which cannot be mitigated by either "Chinese" or "Western" ways of thinking.

Where are we now? If the first part of the attempt here at a sketch of the *history* of an odd *relationship* has been even remotely successful, then it seems that we, as Western philosophers, are faced with a particularly unpleasant methodological issue. How might it be possible to read Indian philosophy, Japanese philosophy, Indian Philosophy, Islamic philosophy, and so on, if the very determination of these different categories of philosophy is overwritten with an unrecognized form of historical conceit? This is not just a "moral failing," to be sure, since the problem is with the very logic of naively using these sorts of distinctions. But, let me end this, not with a "new set of categories" or a "new methodology," but with a final question concerning the utility of the distinction between Western and Chinese philosophies.

This *utility* of Chinese philosophy marks yet another site of cultural differentiation, for if one simply visits what is generally termed the "New Age" section of a bookstore, there will be no shortage of titles which purport to illumine some "Oriental" or "Chinese" way of living which is more benevolent, more at one with the universe than our own. If one surveys the popularity of Taoism and Confucianism within the "New Age" movement, then one sees immediately that at the very least there is a *market* for "Chinese thought." There is also, consequently, the existence of a certain Western "mining" operation, one which can unearth and import "Chinese philosophy" as artifact,

following the imperialist vision of L. Adams Beck as stated in the preface to his 1928 text, *The Story of Oriental Philosophy*.[60] He writes: "The value of the thought of Asia is daily more realized by Western thinkers. The demand for knowledge of its riches grows more and more insistent. The caravans still journey from the heart of Asia, carrying merchandise more to be desired than gold or jewels."[61] Disraeli's infamous remark, "The East is a career," might now be rewritten as this: "Eastern *thought* is a career."

The marketability of Chinese (more generally, "Oriental") thought requires that this thought *be*, in some sense or another, Chinese. One would hardly think of buying *The Tao of Business Management* (a real text), if one did not think that there existed within its pages some kernel of Oriental wisdom to be applied to the world of business management. In fact, what we desire, what we are actually attempting to buy, *is* the essence of a different culture. But can this make any sense? Does the consumption of Chinese food confer Chineseness? Does reading the *Bhagavad Gita* make one more attuned to the nuances of Indian culture? If so, then what has been demonstrated by this cultural "migration" is the fact that the borders between cultures are arguably only as sharp and impenetrable as we want them to be; the "borders" of culture are no more real than the borders of states. The suggestion for the practice of comparative philosophy is thus something like a willful forgetting of borders, not the watchful preservation of them. In other words, "hybrid," comparative philosophies ought not to aim at preserving the

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[60] Note here the use of "story," as opposed to the more official "history."
[61] L. Adams Beck, *The Story of Oriental Philosophy*, (New York: New Home Library, 1928), p. v.

distinctions between "Western" and "Chinese" philosophy, but rather at escaping them all together, giving up the need to identify some particular thesis as inherently more "Western" or "Chinese."

If we accept the fact that we live in a "multicultural" world, and that the "differences" between cultures and peoples ought not to be the basis for oppression but rather the point of departure for the production of new forms of human knowledge, we must accept that there is more to this "multiculturalism" than the simple staging of ethnic dances for educational entertainment or the parading out of the inherently culture-bound ideas of "Chinese" philosophy before the "Western" gaze. A "respect for difference" entails more than simply making the claim that now "we are unbiased," it entails the willingness to relinquish the tenacity with which we hold the claim that there is something within ourselves which unifies and grounds "our culture." For if difference is to be anything other than a repetition of the old logics of domination, we must come to terms with not only "our" historical *a priori*, our unthought in relation to "other" cultures, but with the fact that perhaps, echoing Nietzsche, "We are *unknown* to ourselves... we have never *sought* ourselves, how could it ever be that we should ever *find* ourselves?"

CHAPTER 4

THAT GODLESS, OTHER TIME

4.1 Intercultural Time

> Once Time is recognized as a dimension, not just a measure, of human activity, any attempt to eliminate it from interpretive discourse can only result in distorted and largely meaningless representations.... To be sure, chronology is only a means to an ulterior end. The temporal distancing it involves is needed to show that natural laws or law-like regularities operate in the development of human society and culture.
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> —Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other*

In the previous chapter, I attempted to show that, embedded within philosophical praxis was an inherent attitude toward what is marked as "Chinese" philosophy, an attitude which functioned to remove Chinese philosophy from the sphere of the Western in order to either demarcate it as a proper object of philosophical analysis or to preserve a certain theoretical perspective whereby the incisiveness of philosophical insight is determined by the distance one can attain from the systems one wishes to scrutinize. This removal of Chinese philosophy from within the conceptual spaces of Western thought took the form, I argued, of a geographical displacement, a relocation to the "other side of the world" which is simply maintained as a material fact. The very facticity of the Chinese location, however, masks the political motivations for such a displacement, attempting to shroud them in the honorable robes of pure fact. Far from being a disinterested observation, the identification of the Chinese as occupying the farthest extremity of "our world" is instead an observation made within a mode of perception which relocates cultural others to other spaces. Thus, the previous chapter can be understood as locating a primarily *spatial* mode of understanding the (Chinese) cultural other. But as such, the analysis of the previous chapter was incomplete, for

what accompanies the spatial is the *temporal*. What further serves to mark the difference of the Chinese and their thought is thus their relegation to a *past*, such that even though there might exist a Chinese society in a time contemporaneous with that of the West, the Chinese are always positioned at a temporal distance, frozen within an ancient mode of thought perpetuated by Confucian stagnation. To be sure, the figures examined in this chapter, Leibniz, Hegel, and Marx, undoubtedly considered Chinese society as occupying lands far removed from their own home sites and the spatial separation between the two cultures is deeply embedded in their understandings of themselves and the other. But what also characterizes their perception of China and Chinese thought is its allochronic location— the Chinese represent a society which, although contemporaneous with their own, is nonetheless governed by ordering principles which the West had long ago superseded.

In this regard, the work of Johannes Fabian is of significant theoretical import, since Fabian's insightful text, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Make Its Object*, is concerned precisely with the ways in which Western discourse about the rest of the world serves only to redefine the space occupied by the non-Western as somehow temporally distant, existing as fossilized structures of bygone times. This discursive imprisonment of the non-Western within the past is concomitant, Fabian argues, with the birth of Western science of anthropology and its attempt to provide a classificatory schemata of human societies. Thus, appellations of "primitive" and "savage" function by denying to societies designated as such the possibility of coevalness, occupation of the same world-historical moment, transforming them, furthermore, into formal objects of study. These "primitive societies" can be studied as relics of the past and legitimate

objects of scientific inquiry, but as for communication with them, that very possibility is foreclosed by their temporal distance— communication requires, at the very least, a shared, intersubjective moment in time.[1]

Intercultural communication is, in this context, always ordered hierarchically. Whether the higher position is occupied by the possession of the revealed truths of Christianity, or the epistemological perspective of Western science, the privileged position is always that of the West, with its superior philosophical and scientific tools. In what follows, the analysis will remain focused upon how the differentiation between Western and Chinese thought is organized, but with additional emphasis placed upon the lines of a temporal difference which is deployed along with the deployment of the spatial to preserve and maintain the difference between cultures. This temporality is, of course, deployed differently by each of the three figures surveyed here. Leibniz's location of the Chinese within the past will be different from the position accorded them by Hegel and Marx who are, arguably, already operating within a vastly different episteme. In addition, it is unclear whether there can be any salvation for Hegel's Chinese, as opposed to the salvation that awaits the Chinese who inhabit the texts of Leibniz and Marx. But let us begin by addressing precisely this question of "salvation" by examining Leibniz's attempt to come to terms with the godless Chinese who cannot understand their own past and who have thus remained trapped within it for centuries.

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[1] Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). See especially chapters one and four.

4.2 A Certain Blindness

If it is true that "China" appears within the voluminous corpus of Leibniz's writings[2] more often than those other strikingly Leibnizian terms, "entelechy," "monads," "pre-established harmony," and so on, then an immediately obvious question is to ask why it is the case that no philosophical discussion of Leibniz's thought ever mentions this fact.[3] The simplest response to this question would be to parade the age-old distinction between what counts as the proper object of philosophical analysis and what does not—Leibniz's writings on China are philosophically uninteresting, because they do not address properly philosophical issues. The problem with this approach is that it rejects *a priori* the possibility that what Leibniz has to say about China and Chinese philosophy has anything to do with his theories of "pre-established harmony between monads" and the like. It is as if Leibniz's writings on China can simply be dismissed the way one might dismiss a comment by Russell on the virtues of chocolate ice cream. The vicissitudes of a particular philosopher's *taste,* the peculiar historical attitudes which s/he might display toward the sociohistorical events of his/her time are to be dismissed in favor of more rigorous analyses of the eternally true (read: philosophical) propositions of his/her thoughts and texts.

But is this the case with our present concern? Might not this deliberate blindness to the presence of China and Chinese thought within the Leibnizian oeuvre mark

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[2] Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, "Preface," *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), p. xi.

[3] There are a few references, of course, but the text by Cook and Rosemont, along with a few other exceedingly rare discussion compose all of the philosophical discussion on the topic. A cursory examination of the texts on Leibniz should suffice to prove this claim.

something more than the philosophical irrelevance of a pre-Enlightenment philosopher's musings about a society other than his own? Is it possible or legitimate for us to treat Leibniz's thought as somehow compartmentalized, imagining that when Leibniz was writing about monads, he was somehow disengaged from what he thought about the Chinese and that, like a primitive computer, the data contained within the files of one program in Leibniz's head did not affect or influence the files within another? It is understandable that we might want to argue that what one thinks about a particular flavor of ice cream does not have any direct influence upon what one thinks about, say, the status of truth and the structures of belief. But given the unquestionably heavy presence of China within Leibniz's text, I believe that in this case what Leibniz thinks about China, while it might not teleologically predetermine the trajectories of his philosophy, is nonetheless significant and cannot be simply excised from an examination of his work. What it thus under examination here is this significance— the hitherto unexamined ways in which the Leibniz's knowledge of China and Chinese thought might inform his work and provide for us a glimpse at what might be the first sustained discussion of Chinese thought by a Western philosopher.[4] This is not to say, of course, that Leibniz's thought is consequently *derivative* from what he knew of Chinese philosophy. Rather, my aim here is to situate Leibniz within a history of attempts in the

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[4] The question of what "Chinese" and "Western" denotes is, of course, precisely part of the problem here. At this point, I will use "Chinese" and "Western" to designate, arbitrarily and perhaps problematically, simply those persons and things which exist within geographical spaces demarcated as Chinese or Western. Leibniz is a "Western" philosopher, not because he holds a certain set of beliefs, but simply because he lives within Europe. Thus, at this point, "Western" might be seen as referring simply to "American and European," with "Chinese" referring in a similar fashion, to what lives and exists within the geographical and historical borders of what we call "China."

genealogy of Western philosophy to come to terms with the "philosophy" of what is marked as culturally or socially other.[5]

The contemporary blindness to what Leibniz had to say about 18th century Europe's contact with Chinese thought and culture perhaps reflects not only an unwillingness to acknowledge the socio-historical specificity of Leibniz's thought, but also the (nonconscious?) attempt to render the history of the Western intellectual tradition hermetic, closing off the possibility that cultures and societies have never existed as stable, self-contained unities untouched by interfusion with heterogeneous elements from the outside. This seemingly perennial failure to examine the multitude of ways in which Western philosophy has always already been in contact with and informed by non-Western thought should not be seen as simply ethnocentric, however. As I have already argued, this "failure" should perhaps be seen more fruitfully as a moment in the constitution of philosophical "culture" itself. Thus, what is interesting in the case of Leibniz and the silence of philosophy is not the condemnatory claim that "Western philosophy is intolerant and ethnocentric," but rather what we can glean from this (and other) cases to produce a philosophical critique of the ideology of "culture" which manages to escape the doomed logic of PC-multiculturalism.

In the case of Leibniz the task is difficult, since the texts involved in the philosophical excavation involve at least four different languages and a philosophical

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[5] I am fully aware, of course, that this contact between Western and non-Western philosophies is by no means the first. Indeed, the presence of Arabian commentators of Aristotle and the Islamic philosophers of the Medieval ages is testimony to the fact that the contours of Western philosophy have always included moments of deep interfusion with cultures perceived as being situated outside of the West. Here, my concern is with

history which is inextricably linked to the beginnings of human thought, regardless of cultural location. But, given that Leibniz's primary aim in his discussions of Chinese thought was the promulgation of an *accord* between the worlds of 18th century Europe and China, we could perhaps see the project here as the attempt to bring Leibniz's dream to fruition, though he himself failed both historically and, I will argue, philosophically. Part of my argument here will naturally consist of a critique of the ways in which Leibniz attempted to enact this dream, but despite my problems with Leibniz and his conceptualization of Chinese thought, I strongly believe that Leibniz's dream of a global accord is not entirely misguided. For one thing, coming to terms with the imagined ethnicity of Western philosophy might be a means of escaping the deadlocks of contemporary philosophical and cultural criticism and expanding, if only for a moment, the horizons of philosophical thought.

4.3 The Terms of Assimilation

Apart from trade, the most significant "first" contacts between the West and China occurred as Christian missionaries, spurred by their desire to unify the globe under the auspices of Christian theology, attempted to spread the revealed truths of Christianity to the populace of China. Leibniz himself saw the paramount importance of the Christian task, closing the text of his "Preface to the NOVISSIMA SINICA"[6] with the following description: "Certainly the size of the Chinese Empire is so great, the reputation of this wisest nation in the Orient so impressive, and its authority so influential

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philosophies identified as "Chinese," and the claim that Leibniz serves as a good starting point for the delineation of marking Chinese philosophy as Chinese.

[6] Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, "Preface," *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), pp. 45-59.

example to the rest, that scarcely since apostolic times has any greater work appeared for the Christian faith to accomplish."[7] Indeed, it was through the writings of the Jesuit missionaries in China, particularly the writings of Matteo Ricci, who had been granted a stipend by the Chinese emperor and given a residence in Beijing, that Leibniz received almost all of his knowledge of China.

But the missionaries were plagued by the difficulties of translating the Christian doctrines into a language which provides no easy linguistic equivalents for such "simple" notions as "God," "soul," "resurrection," and so on. Anxious not to repeat the failures in Japan (where the choice of the Japanese word "Dainichi" (Vairocana-Buddha) as the Japanese equivalent for God doomed missionary efforts there[8]), missionaries in China hotly disputed the proper translations into Chinese of Christian terminology. In addition, the matter of various Chinese practices had to be accounted for. Was the reverence held for Confucius and the shrines built to him evidence of a secular practice, or were they inherently blasphemous? Were Chinese offerings to the "spirits of departed ancestors" pagan or reconcilable to the practice of Christianity? In short, could the practices and thought of the Chinese be understood as compatible with Christian doctrines, or ought the missionaries urge the rejection of them altogether?

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[7] G. W. Leibniz, "Preface to the NOVISSIMA SINICA," *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), §22. The NOVISSIMA SINICA was a text which brought to its readers the latest news from the exotic lands of the Orient. Leibniz's contribution here consisted solely of the preface to the book.

[8] Arthur F. Wright, "The Chinese Language and Foreign Ideas," *Studies in Chinese Thought*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 289.

As the 17th century ended, Leibniz became quickly embroiled in this debate, which became eventually known as "the Rites Controversy." The first Jesuit missionaries in China, led by Matteo Ricci, had been of the former position, holding that the displacement of the traditional Chinese beliefs with Christianity would be impossible; the Confucian ideals and traditions built into the structures of social power would render this displacement practically unfeasible.[9] Thus, the position of Matteo Ricci and his supporters (which included Leibniz), the Accomodationist position, attempted to facilitate the conversion of the Chinese to the Christian faith by treating the ritual offerings of food and other items to dead ancestors as merely secular rites which converts to Christianity could continue to practice without fear of blaspheming God. For the Accomodationists, the reverence held by the literati for the figure of Confucius did not put Confucius in the position of a "false God," but was simply the rendering of honor to an influential figure of the past. The Anti-accomodationist position, however, argued for by the missionaries who followed Ricci, primarily Longobardi and Sainte-Marie, thought that Confucianism and its attendant rituals of ancestor "worship" and so forth, posed a direct challenge to the supremacy of the Christian God and ought to be considered fundamentally blasphemous. For the Anti-accomodationists, the acceptance of Christianity necessarily entailed the rejection of these and other practices. After fierce

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[9] There are various accounts of the Rites controversy and its history. To name a few: David Mungello, *Leibniz and Confucianism: the Search for Accord*, (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1977) pp. 1-17; Jacques Granet, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 495-525; D. P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology*, (London: Duckworth, 1972), pp. 194-230; and finally, Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. two, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), pp. 496-505.

debate, the matter was referred to the pope, who sided with the Anti-accomodationists, decreeing that Chinese who became Christians could no longer engage in these blasphemous social practices. By way of reply, the Chinese emperor banned the teaching of Christianity within Chinese borders in 1724.

Leibniz's major writings on China are thematically centered within the terms of the Rites Controversy. The focus of the argumentation is primarily upon arguing against Longobardi and Sainte-Marie in the attempt to prove that the Chinese practices and texts were not in and of themselves blasphemous. But if we set aside the functional surface of these texts for a moment, we quickly discern that there is more at stake than the terms of a long-dead Christian debate. To begin with: we notice the fact that Leibniz, who had himself never traveled to China and who did not speak Chinese, approaches the Classical philosophical texts he uses to prove the Accomodationist case from the outside. In other words, Leibniz's understanding of the "true" Chinese position is always mediated by some other translator or missionary. Thus, an analysis of Leibniz's work might be better situated, not in terms of the *truth* of what he says about the thought of the Chinese, but rather with an eye to distinguishing his mode of perception with regard to other "cultures." What assumptions does he make about the "culture" of the Chinese and their thought? And, in this case, what profound influence might Leibniz have had upon the formation of hermeneutical possibilities in the interactions between previously "closed" social groups? In short, how might Leibniz have set the tone for future interpretations of the "meaning" of Chinese philosophy, pursuing specific avenues of investigation at the cost of forgoing others?

4.4 The Difference of the Chinese

As we examine Leibniz's texts on China, the first point we ought to bear in mind is that he is not operating with a notion of "culture" like the one which we, in the late 20th century are inclined to hold. That is to say, the idea of "culture" as "the way of life of a people" is not part of the active intellectual vocabulary of Leibniz's time.[10] Consequently, we cannot simply say of Leibniz that he had a particular attitude toward the "culture" of the Chinese, since the extent to which he even recognizes the Chinese as "possessing" a culture is unclear. We would at most be able to say that he drew a distinction between the ways, thought, and customs of the Chinese and those of the West. Although this matter might seem *prima facie* trivial, the general focus of our investigation here— the perception and constitution of cultural alterity— prevents us from treating this distinction lightly. For if Leibniz does not see the Chinese as *culturally* distinct, then we might be able to delineate some of the salient features of the perception of cultural difference, partially tracing their origins to the figure of Leibniz. As a result, our investigation of the mode of differentiation Leibniz employs in discussing the Chinese will have to presume that it is not a difference in "culture" which produces the difference of the Chinese. In other words, the task here is to locate the possible presence, within Leibniz's writings, of the discursive origins of the philosophical essentialism which believes to this day that, beyond the contingencies of borders and language, there persists some sublime "Chinese" thing at the heart of all Chinese texts.

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[10] See Chris Jenks, *Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1993), especially pp. 1-15.

There is, first of all, the matter of the *physical* separation between the social spaces of Leibniz's Europe and China of that time. This physical separation, instead of simply being a physical "fact" about the world, is part of the way in which we organize the social map of the world, and is intimately connected to the ways in which we are able to locate cultural others and the space of other cultures. With regard to Leibniz, we can see that he is careful to note this fact. The very first line of Leibniz's "Preface to the NOVISSIMA SINICA," a collection of the "latest news from China" which Leibniz edited and published, establishes the geographical extremes of Europe and China. He writes, "I consider it a singular plan of the fates that human cultivation and refinement should today be concentrated, as it were, in the two extremes of our continent, in Europe and in Tschina [sic], which adorns the Orient as Europe does the opposite edge of the earth."[11]

The point in examining this remark is not to question the "truth" of this fact, to dispute the veracity of the claim that China does indeed lie at the "opposite edge" of the Eurasian landmass. What is more significant are the social meanings of this fact for the imagination of the reader of Leibniz's preface and for Leibniz himself. For the implicit suggestion which always seems to be linked to the perception of physical distance is that the farther away from "us" "they" are, the more *different* "they" become.[12] Thus, we might propose, in a preliminary manner, that there is at work in the interactions between

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[11] G. W. Leibniz, "Preface to the NOVISSIMA SINICA," *Leibniz: Writings on China*. Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), §1.
[12] One could look, for example, at the preface to Michel Foucault's *The Order of Things*, where Foucault describes the project of his work as the result of an encounter with the epistemological order of the culture "at the other side of the world." Interestingly, Foucault's encounter with Chinese thought is also mediated— by the work of Borges.

cultures an unwritten and unspoken social axiom: *distance entails difference.* Thus, underlying the discussion of the "concrete" differences which follow in this Leibnizian text is the tacit acceptance of a geographical imaginary which divides the world into poles, with the greatest distance between social worlds mapped onto the greatest differences in social structure. What must be taken into account in considering this geographical imaginary is the fact that it does not simply *reflect* pre-existing differences between Europeans and Chinese— it also *reinforces* the perception of difference so that it becomes possible to imagine that this difference is grounded, not just in miles, but in ontology as well.[13]

But the point here is not that physical distance was a meaningless triviality in Leibniz's time. Rather, since the historical bases of the imagination of social distance and the perception of space are quite unlike what we experience at present, are we not directed toward a fundamental *contemporary* limitation in the conceptualization of cultural alterity? The shrinkage of the space of the globe vis-à-vis the development of transportation technologies, telecommunication networks and satellite linkups avails us of the possibility of a transformed understanding of the space of the world and the lifeworlds of the people who inhabit it. For Leibniz, China and Europe do indeed lie at the opposite ends of the earth, and this fact is significant, not because it is the manifestation of a form of false geopolitical consciousness, but because this

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[13] I attended a paper at the "Philosophy, Interpretation, Culture" conference at Binghamton University which argued precisely this. The author claimed that the Chinese practice of *qigong*, a form of physical meditation similar to *taiqi*, produced a different phenomenological experience of the body. What the author shied away from, of course, was the impending conclusion that *the bodies themselves were different* as a result of substantially different modes of "inhabiting" them.

conceptualization still underlies our contemporary understanding of the differences in cultural and social spaces.

So much for maps. There remains the question of the "other time" which the Chinese occupy as a result of being so detached from the movement of civilization here defined as the developments of Western philosophy and science. This difference can be discerned, not as overtly as the assertions of the fact of physical distance, but it is nonetheless present within Leibniz's writings on the Chinese, specifically within the assumptions which undergird his perceptions of the "social differences" between Europeans and the Chinese. As I will show, even the seemingly harmless difference which Leibniz identifies between the Chinese and Europeans, that the Chinese are more "ethical" or "civil" than Europeans, has linkages with the Chinese location in an other time.

Leibniz writes that "certainly they [the Chinese] surpass us (though it is almost shameful to confess this) in practical philosophy, that is, in the precepts of ethics and politics adapted to the present life and use of mortals."[14] This foundation of practical philosophy manifests itself, of course, in the amazing civility of the Chinese:

> As our people have noticed in amazement, the Chinese peasants and servants, when they bid farewell to friends, or when they first enjoy the sight of each other after a long separation, behave to each other so lovingly and respectfully, that they challenge all the politeness of European magnates.... Thus it happens that scarcely anyone offends another by the smallest word in common conversation. And they rarely show evidences of hatred, wrath, or excitement.... Neighbors and even

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[14] G. W. Leibniz, "Preface to the NOVISSIMA SINICA," *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), §3.

> members of a family are so held back by a hedge of custom that they are able to maintain a kind of perpetual courtesy.[15]

This fundamental (cultural) civility of the Chinese[16] is peculiar in that unlike, say, Aristotle's notions of ethics and the "good life," they are not grounded by philosophical theory. Leibniz points out repeatedly that the Chinese "lack" the principles of argumentation and philosophy so firmly entrenched in Europe.[17] That is, this "ethicality" is presented as the result of a sort of habituation which occurred without the benefits of philosophical debates over the abstract notions of Good, Justice, and so forth. Without the fundament of philosophical theory, the good-natured civility of the Chinese is strikingly similar to ethnographic accounts of the good-naturedness of the inhabitants of "primitive" cultures who live in the idyllic world of a society seemingly untouched by the social ills of scarring Western societies.[18]

But despite the great advantages wrought by this habituated civility, the Chinese lack something, a lack that guarantees their social inferiority: "...the Chinese do not

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[15] G. W. Leibniz, "Preface to the NOVISSIMA SINICA," *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), §4.
[16] This motif appears repeatedly in any discussion or comparison between Western and Chinese cultures. Bertrand Russell, for example, writes in *The Problem of China* that the Chinese are a "nation possessed of exquisite manners and perfect courtesy," p. 190. Russell's mode of cultural perception will be examined in the next chapter.
[17] As when he writes in the "Preface to the NOVISSIMA SINICA" that "In profundity of knowledge and in the theoretical disciplines we are their superiors. For besides logic and metaphysics, and the knowledge of things incorporeal, which we justly claim as peculiarly our province, we excel by far in the understanding of concepts which are abstracted by the mind from the material.... The Chinese are thus seen to be ignorant of that great light of the mind, the art of demonstration, and they have remained content with a sort of empirical geometry, which our artisans universally possess," §2.
[18] See James Boon's account of the manner in which ethnographic accounts of the inhabitants of Bali are all strictly maintained within a visuality which presents them as the inhabitants of a timeless world in *The Anthropological Romance of Bali, 1597-1972*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

attain to full and complete virtue. This is not to be expected except by Heaven's grace and Christian teaching."[19] We expect the Chinese to be deficient in divine grace, of course, for that was the entire *purpose* of contact with China, but the failure of the Chinese to receive divine dispensation in the form of the revealed truths of Christianity guarantees another deficiency: the absence of a history of philosophy dedicated to unraveling the mysteries of Christian metaphysics and its concomitant generation of the principles of First Philosophy. From the lack of First Philosophy, it is a short step to the claim that the Chinese lack scientific principles and truths such as those of geometry. For the practical purpose of conversion then, Leibniz recommends that one ought first to teach geometry to the Chinese, inculcating the desire for more European knowledge, moving then to teaching the Chinese the principles of First Philosophy, which would in turn pave the way for the introduction of the Christian religion. Indeed, the "twin arts" of geometry and First Philosophy are, Leibniz believes, the two "eyes" which Europe possesses and the Chinese do not.[20]

Consequently, the first step in locating the Chinese contemporary to Leibniz in an allochronic position to their European counterparts is their presentation as childlike, requiring the education which the West can provide. In the terms of the classic coupling of the visual with knowledge, the Chinese require that their eyes be opened to the truths

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[19] G. W. Leibniz, "Preface to the NOVISSIMA SINICA," *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), §5.
[20] Leibniz writes in the "Preface to the NOVISSIMA SINICA" that "Although they may be convinced that we are one-eyed, we have still another eye, not yet well enough understood by them, namely, First Philosophy. Through it we are admitted to an understanding even of things incorporeal. Verbiest was prepared to teach them this, rightly judging that it would prepare an opening for the Christian religion, but death intervened," §9.

of the world. Civility and ethicality might be something valuable, but without the truths of science and philosophy, these are simply the character traits of good-natured simpletons. Of course, this is all that the Chinese are, since they are blind to the meanings and significance of their own intellectual tradition. Furthermore, the location of the Chinese in an alterior time is not presented as an arbitrary act of self-centered interpretation. The Chinese are where they are because of a developmental failure—they have been derailed from the proper sequence of social development by the fact that they are *bad readers*.

It is the "blindness" of the Chinese (they must be blind, since they lack the "eyes" of the West) which makes them such bad readers of their own tradition. The problem for the missionaries out to convert the Chinese is, in Leibniz's opinion, that without the hermeneutical tools of Philosophy and Science, the Chinese are doomed to misread and mistake the true meanings of their own ancient texts. Indeed, one of the benefits conferred upon the Chinese by their contact with the West is the introduction of proper reading tools, just as one would teach the Jews how to interpret their tradition:

> It is not absurd for discerning Europeans (such as Ricci) to see something today which is not adequately known by the Chinese erudites, and to be able to interpret their ancient books better than the erudites themselves. Who does not know in our own day that Christian scholars are much better interpreters of the most ancient books of the Hebrews than the Jews themselves? How often strangers have better insight into the histories and monuments of a nation than their own citizens! This is even more likely concerning doctrines more than twenty centuries removed from the Chinese, who are quite possibly not as equipped with the interpretive aids as we, informed about Chinese literature, and especially aided by European methods.[21]

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[21] G. W. Leibniz, "On the Civil Cult of Confucius," *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), §11.

And elsewhere:

> It is indeed apparent that if we Europeans were well informed concerning Chinese Literature, then, with the aid of logic, critical thinking, mathematics and our manner of expressing thought— more exacting than theirs— we could uncover in the Chinese writings of the remotest antiquity many things unknown to modern Chinese and even to other commentators thought to be classical.[22]

And so the depiction of the state of the Chinese tradition which this preliminary reading of Leibniz yields is one in which the founders of the society wrote profound and not-entirely-mistaken works which have, due to the absence of divine grace and the hermeneutical tools this provides, fallen into a state of considerable disrepair, with the millions of people who claim that tradition as part of their heritage unable to discern, beneath the dissimulations of their own intellectuals, the truth of their own historical inheritance.

But the story is perhaps a bit more complex. Not only have the Chinese contemporary with Leibniz been misled by bad readers, what they have failed to thus receive is the various bits of the Christian faith which lurk within the classical texts. Leibniz's intention, in his "Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese" is, to be sure, well-meant, since the piece is primarily focused upon rebutting the arguments of Longobardi and the Anti-accomodationists to show that the natural theology contained within the Confucian classics at the very least do not contradict the truths of European First Philosophy. Once again completely dependent upon the translations of Chinese texts provided by the Jesuits and Longobardi himself, Leibniz attempts to present a

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[22] G. W. Leibniz, "Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese", *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), §68.

reinterpretation of them to show that, far from being evidence of materialist protoatheist thought, the content of these texts is quite compatible with Christian doctrine.

But it is difficult to reconcile such intentions with the fact that Leibniz seems to think that he is the person capable of doing what none of his Chinese contemporaries were able to do. If Leibniz seriously holds that "Among the Chinese... neither history nor criticism nor philosophy are sufficiently developed," and that "no one at all has yet emerged who has produced a literary history of the Chinese and who has attributed the true works, meanings and sense to each author,"[23] then does not his claim that the true meaning of the (Neo-Confucian) Chinese term *li* is actually something like the "sovereign substance which we [Europeans] revere under the name of God"[24] force us to the conclusion that Leibniz has succeeded where millions of Chinese have failed? Leibniz adds later that: "Chinese philosophy more closely approaches Christian theology than the philosophy of the ancient Greeks who considered matter as coeval with God."[25] But given that Leibniz also holds that since the philosophy of the Chinese lacks systematic organization and even philosophical terminology (why call it philosophy, then?), "nothing prevents interpreting what the ancients teach about divine and spiritual things in a more favorable sense,"[26] the only thing which guarantees the stability of the meaning of

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[23] G. W. Leibniz, "Remarks on Chinese Rites and Religion", *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), §5.
[24] G. W. Leibniz, "Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese", *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), §9.
[25] G. W. Leibniz, "Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese", *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), §24a.
[26] G. W. Leibniz, "Remarks on Chinese Rites and Religion", *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), §7.

Leibniz's "interpretation" is the fact that it is the truth bestowed by divine dispensation. In other words, Leibniz's reading of Chinese texts is given authority by the fact that he is privy to "the one Revelation which can explain to us the beginning of the universe."[27] Put simply, Leibniz succeeds and discovers the truth where the Chinese have been misled or mistaken because he has access to the Truth given by divine (Christian) dispensation.

Thus, in the spatial and temporal distance which marks the separation between the West and China, we find a justification for European intervention. It is a task of educating the savage and civilizing the pagan so that they may assume their proper roles in world-society. The question of cultural difference is not really a question of culture at all. It is simply a matter of education and the promulgation of proper instruction. The West's superiority lies in the fact that it sees where the Chinese do not. Given this distinction, it is not an act of chauvinism to suggest that the Chinese need Western instruction. Rather, it is an act of beneficence— setting the Chinese on the path of true enlightenment. Thus, everything "fits." All of the parts of Leibniz's imagined globe have their proper place and function within its hierarchical gradations.

4.5 The "Pre-Established Harmony" between Leibniz and the Chinese

Without dwelling too long upon the task of recreating the whole of Leibniz's complicated metaphysical scheme, let us simply note that for Leibniz, the universe was understood as composed of "windowless monads," each of which contained within it, an "entelechy," or active principle. These monads were combined to form bodies and were

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[27] G. W. Leibniz, "Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese", *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), §24a.

ordered hierarchically, thus constituting the basic building unit for everything in the world. What provided this order was a "pre-established harmony" between monads, given by "prior divine artifice," guaranteeing the functional stability of the cosmos and the individual monad's "clarity of perception" with respect to its own active principle.[28] This conceptualization of natural order and hierarchy had, of course, political consequences. It prevented, for example, the materialist tendency to atheism which Leibniz found problematic in Hobbesian philosophy,[29] by reinforcing God's position at the top of the natural order and asserting the presence of divine intent throughout it. By arguing for a hierarchical metaphysics, Leibniz could be seen as attempting to produce an understanding of the ideal civil society in which rank and position ought to be "strictly correlated with goodness and with clarity of perception."[30]

There are two matters which bear closer examination here. First, there is something striking about the coincidental *similarity* between classical Chinese philosophy and Leibniz's own thought which is produced when Leibniz turns to an examination of Chinese philosophy. Second, given Leibniz's understanding of the bases of society and social order, facts which he admittedly does not discuss at great length,

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[28] For a careful and thorough (leaving out a discussion of the social world and China, of course) treatment of Leibniz's metaphysics see Catherine Wilson's text *Leibniz's Metaphysics.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989, especially chapter five.
[29] For an interesting critique of Hobbes, see Leibniz's "Caesarinus Furstenerius (De Suprematu Principum Germaniae)," *Leibniz: Political Writings*, Patrick Riley, trans. and ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972). Leibniz writes that "if we listen to Hobbes, there will be nothing in our land but out-and-out anarchy.... Hobbes' demonstrations have a place only in that state whose king is God, whom alone one can trust in all things." p. 118.
[30] Catherine Wilson, *Leibniz's Metaphysics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 202.

compared to the amount of time he spent discussing metaphysics, what conclusions could we draw about Leibniz's understanding of the place of the Chinese within the social order of the globe guaranteed by God?

In light of the fact that Leibniz considers the "modern" Chinese to be atheists,[31] and that his proper reading of the Chinese texts produces an understanding of the Chinese concepts *li* and *qi* which is perfectly compatible with Christian doctrine, it is ironic that these concepts did not play the role in classical Chinese thought which Leibniz supposed and were rather the results of the metaphysical impulse of the Neo-Confucianists beginning around the time of the Song Dynasty (960-1280).[32] Leibniz's examination of the classical Chinese texts translated by Jesuit missionaries makes no distinction between the thought and texts of the Classical period (roughly 500-200 BC) and the rebirth of interest in Confucian thought in the beginnings of the Song Dynasty. All of the Chinese texts are relegated to the dusty past, without concern for their proper historical placement. Granted, Leibniz could simply have been misinformed, but the ease with which he relegates everything he discusses to Chinese antiquity is highly problematic. To draw a parallel with European philosophy, Leibniz could be seen as assuming that the work of the Medieval Scholastics were indistinguishable from the works of the ancient Greeks in the quest for ascertaining the *meaning* of Western philosophy.

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[31] Leibniz observes in the "Remarks on Chinese Rites and Religion" that "The Chinese literati are atheists, they believe the world is the result of chance..." §1.
[32] See chapter four of David Mungello, *Leibniz and Confucianism: The Search for Accord*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1977).

Why make such an obvious mistake? We could simply assume that Leibniz was just misinformed and thus allowed himself to make assumptions he was unwarranted in making. But this explanation fails to address something deeper— the idea that Leibniz perhaps desperately *wanted* to find similarities between his metaphysics and that which could be deduced from the Chinese texts he read. In other words, Leibniz always already reads the texts of the "Chinese" philosophical tradition with an eye to determining its proper position within his own philosophical system. Rather than entertaining the notion that what is revealed by the Chinese texts is the necessity for a *revision* of philosophical framework, Chinese thought is always understood as an ancient component of the pre-established divine harmony and thus assimilable. Although it might be problematic to suggest a psychological motivation for Leibniz's theoretical mistake, I believe that if we examine his position on the meaning of the *Yi Jing,* we find support for this hypothesis.

During Leibniz's correspondence with the Jesuit missionary Bouvet, Bouvet discovered a correlation between Leibniz's newly developed idea of a binary logic and the divinatory symbols of the *Yi Jing.*[33] Bouvet thought that these symbols were not tools for prognostication, as they were then used by the Chinese, but rather part of an ancient treatise on binary logic. If this were true, then an Accomodationist argument could be made, attempting to show that the Chinese themselves, within their ancient texts, possessed knowledge of the world compatible with the ideas produced by theological philosophy. Leibniz, understandably, was excited by this (coincidental)

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[33] See the discussion in David Mungello, *Leibniz and Confucianism: The Search for Accord,* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1977), chapter three.

correlation. The final sections of both the "Remarks on Chinese Rites and Religion" and the "Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese" are concerned with the possibilities generated by this concurrence. For example, Leibniz concludes the "Remarks" with the following observation:

> And thus, as far as I understand, I think the substance of the ancient theology of the Chinese is intact and, purged of additional errors, can be harnessed to the great truths of the Christian religion. Fohi, the most ancient prince and philosopher of the Chinese, had understood the origin of things from unity and nothing, i.e., his mysterious figures reveal something of an analogy to Creation, containing the binary arithmetic (and yet hinting at greater things) that I rediscovered after so many thousands of years....[34]

The similarity which Bouvet and Leibniz had uncovered was this: the *Yi Jing* is composed of a series of sixty-four figures, or hexagrams, which in turn are composed by combinations of two trigrams. Each trigram is in turn composed of the combination of single, unbroken lines, and broken lines in groups of three. By attributing to the unbroken line a value of one and to the broken line a value of zero, Leibniz was able to produce a numerical correspondence such that a certain order of the hexagrams produced the sequence of numbers from zero to sixty-four.

Setting aside for a moment the evidence presented by Joseph Needham in *Science and Civilization in China* that the Chinese performed mathematics without the notion of a mathematical zero until it was conceptually imported from Indian mathematics in the ninth century, the general opinion on this matter is that the similarity between Leibniz's binary system and the ordering of the *Yi Jing* hexagrams is simply

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[34] G. W. Leibniz, "Remarks on Chinese Rites and Religion", *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), §9.

coincidence.[35] But for Leibniz, the similarity was proof positive of the superiority of the methods of European philosophy in investigating both the natural and social worlds. For by means of European thought:

> more exacting than theirs... Reverend Father Bouvet and I have discovered the meaning, apparently truest to the text, of the characters of Fohi, founder of Empire, which consist simply of combinations of broken and unbroken lines, and which pass for the most ancient writing of China in its simplest form.... Actually, the 64 figures represent a Binary Arithmetic which apparently this great legislator possessed, and which I have rediscovered some thousands of years later.[36]

By finding support for his own theory in the ancient texts of a language he does not read, in a social world at the furthest extreme of the Eurasian landmass, Leibniz can only believe that with his philosophical tools, he has without question tapped into part of the ultimate truth of the world.

In addition, the fact that Leibniz's Chinese contemporaries use the hexagrams of the *Yi Jing* for divination reaffirms his belief that it is the modern Chinese who have strayed from the path of true wisdom, and that by explaining the true meaning of their own texts to them, they will then recover the wisdom already possessed by their ancient ancestors. This correspondence, in turn, provides further evidence for the other similarities between Leibniz's thought and that of the Chinese, to which he hopes to restore its "proper meaning."[37] But given that Leibniz also believes that "nothing

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[35] See Needham's discussion in *Science and Civilization in China*, vol. two, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), pp. 340-345.
[36] G. W. Leibniz, "Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese", *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), §68.
[37] G. W. Leibniz, "Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese", *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), §3.

prevents interpreting what the [Chinese] ancients teach about divine and spiritual things in a more favorable sense,"[38] would we not be justified in claiming that Leibniz has perhaps read too much into Chinese thought?

For these reasons then, that first, the Chinese philosophical texts and terminology which Leibniz discusses are precisely *not* the ancient texts to which he constantly refers; second, Leibniz gives far too much weight to the coincidental similarity between his work on binary logic and the hexagrams of the *Yi Jing*; and third, Leibniz holds that the Chinese texts permits interpretative possibilities which would allow us almost to say whatever we wish it to, Leibniz's assertions that the philosophy of the Chinese is fundamentally and philosophically compatible with the principles of European Christian philosophy do not withstand critical scrutiny. Why, then, might he have clung so tightly to his beliefs?

Given Leibniz's conceptualization of the human social world as patterned on the hierarchical natural world of the monads, the suggestion that the Chinese social world had had access to the same facts as the Europeans would have provided further justification for his metaphysics. For if the Chinese social world could be shown to be, in some sense, only a divergence from the originary point of divine Christian revelation, then the unification of the human world under the auspices of the Christian faith and the principles of First Philosophy is assured. In addition, although Europe might not possess the same degree of civility and politeness evinced by the Chinese social order, they were nonetheless clearly ahead in the pursuit of knowledge. By demonstrating that the

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[38] G. W. Leibniz, "Remarks on Chinese Rites and Religion", *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), §7.

Chinese had always already possessed the germ of Christianity, the philosophical tools of the West prove their usefulness and possibilities, firmly establishing their position at the cutting edge of human development.

4.6 The Groundwork of the Conceptualization of Chinese Philosophy

I wish to conclude this discussion of Leibniz by noting two primary characteristics of Chinese philosophy produced in his writings. These characteristics are not simply "false." What I hope to eventually show, vis-à-vis an analysis of prominent "Western" thinkers, is that more often than not, the attitudes which are displayed toward Chinese philosophy do not reflect the "truth" of Chinese philosophy so much as *produce* it. In other words, Leibniz's conceptualization of Chinese philosophy as a mode of thought can be seen as an inaugural moment in a history of demarcating the proper meaning of the "Chinese" in Chinese philosophy.

Firstly, Leibniz distinguishes between the philosophies of Europe and China by arrogating the possession of science and the demonstrative "art" of geometry to European thought, while tagging Chinese thought with the label of "practicality." Chinese thought is, for Leibniz, more developed in practical terms toward the proper ordering of the social realm. But since the Chinese have lost the truth of their ancient texts by suffering the misfortune of not having been blessed by divine grace, what Chinese philosophy needs is the "more exacting terminology" and "systematic" analysis which European thought provides. This corrective, Leibniz thinks, will also serve to reveal to the Chinese the divine mysteries of the Christian faith and unify the world in a sort of ecumenical universalization.

To this end Leibniz reads Chinese philosophy as being, with a few creative interpretive solutions, essentially the *same in principle* as European thought. But if Chinese thought is understood to be, in *antiquity*, closer to the doctrines of Christian theology and philosophy, are not the subsequent millennia of Chinese history then a kind of aberration? These modern Chinese who have lost the Christian meaning of their own tradition, is not their entire social structure faulty? Leibniz's perception of Chinese thought therefore indexes it as something within the order of an other, ancient time. By demonstrating the "modernity" of the thought of the West, the existence of the Chinese other is necessarily shunted into the past. Any work of unification requires, then, the acceleration of Chinese thought and society. They must be brought back onto the proper track delineated by the progress embodied in Western ideas.

The second conceptualization of Chinese philosophy concerns the issue of whether it is "philosophy" at all. The Chinese are, after all, "a people lacking in metaphysical vocabulary"[39] and "do not possess a philosophical terminology,[40] with the consequence that "neither [their] history nor criticism nor philosophy are sufficiently developed."[41] But if Leibniz has been successful in his project of deriving the true meaning of the ancient texts, and if there are so many similarities between Chinese terms like *li* and *qi* and "philosophical" notions of First Principle and Prime Matter, then has Leibniz not shown that Chinese thought is precisely philosophy?

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[39] G. W. Leibniz, "Remarks on Chinese Rites and Religion", *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), §8.
[40] G. W. Leibniz, "Remarks on Chinese Rites and Religion", *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), §7.
[41] G. W. Leibniz, "Remarks on Chinese Rites and Religion", *Leibniz: Writings on China*, Daniel J. Cook and Henry Rosemont, trans and eds., (La Salle: Open Court, 1994), §5.

This paradoxical dual status of Chinese philosophy as being simultaneously philosophy and not-philosophy is not simply a refusal to recognize the law of contradiction. Instead, I believe it points to a fundamental contradiction in the constitutive moment of philosophy's self-consciousness. That is, Western philosophy becomes "self-aware" only by being able to single out instances of "other" modes of thought which are *not* philosophy. But this moment in the practice of philosophy ultimately leads to the conclusion that everything, as it comes under the gaze of philosophy *becomes philosophical.* In the present case, what is at first not-philosophy, strange Chinese writings on foreign concepts like *li* and *qi,* become slowly assimilated within the framework of philosophical analysis until they can only be comprehended *as* philosophy. In the case of Leibniz, then, I want to suggest that the "Chinese" in "Chinese philosophy" names, not so much some exotic Chinese essence as it does the need of philosophy to identify and mark that which it deems to be outside of it, as a preliminary to its assimilation. This naming presumes, among other things, that there exists a certain unity and stability to the culture in which philosophy functions. Leibniz's writings fail us here, since the lack of texts which deal explicitly with culture gives us no basis for an analysis.

As we have seen, part of Leibniz's difficulty in coming to terms with Chinese philosophy was perhaps rooted in his Christian desire to discover nothing in the world which did not reaffirm the presence of the divine will. Rather than simply claiming that the Chinese and their philosophy were "simply" barbarian and in need of conversion, he felt that he had discovered in the classical texts of Chinese philosophy a form of proto-First Philosophy which resonated with Christian doctrine. It was this presence of the

germ of Christian truth in classical Chinese texts, specifically the *Yi Jing*, which enabled him to conceive of Chinese civilization as a part of the divine plan. But because the Chinese had not received the benefits of the revelations concomitant with the receipt of divine grace, they had subsequently spent the next two thousand years building a misguided civilization based on the failure to recognize the truth of their own tradition. But this Leibinizian mode of approaching the traditions and texts of a social space perceived as radically different is ultimately one of reduction— the Chinese are simply where "we Europeans" might have ended up had we not been so fortunate as to receive divine revelation. As a result, the Chinese do not possess so much a culture different in matter as in *form*, albeit an imperfect one. Consequently, the reconciliation of the difference between the worlds of the Chinese and the European lay in working toward a convergence of form. The tension generated by the perception of the difference between the Chinese who inhabit the other time of the extreme other side of the continent and the Europeans of the West is not resolved, but instead absorbed into the monolithic "pre-established harmony." Since the tools of First Philosophy and Western science had proved their intrinsically powerful nature by being hermeneutically useful— revealing that the Chinese had themselves always possessed within their own texts the beginnings of Christian truth— their divine truth was self-evident. The absorption of the Chinese into the European context required a philosophical re-reading, to demonstrate that there was essentially no difference between the Chinese notions of *li* and *qi* and certain categories in European philosophy.

But this mode of perceiving across social distances contains within it a certain contradiction, embodied in the simultaneous presence of sameness and difference, which

cannot be resolved in Leibniz's terms. One has only to examine the lengths Leibniz to which goes in order to establish that the Chinese are inherently the same, *after* establishing their fundamental difference, to get a sense of this difficulty. For if the Chinese are ultimately "just like us Europeans," then why maintain the rigid distinctions between the two social spheres and the radical alterity of the Chinese? But if they are simply different, completely other to European thought, then Leibniz's position in the Rites Controversy is philosophically flawed— although his intent was perhaps more proto-multicultural than his opponents in that debate, he nonetheless was wrong in assuming that the Chinese could be anything other than barbarians. Their fundamental difference can either be tolerated or subsumed within the more "scientific" methods and philosophies of Europe. But if our investigation has led us to the seeming presence of a contradiction embedded within a particular stance toward the philosophy of the Chinese, what better than to turn now to Hegel, the philosophical theorist of contradiction *par excellence*?

4.7 Between the Two Hegels

As Slavoj Zizek observes in *For They Know Not What They Do*, there is a particular theme which runs through Hegel scholarship, which first reads Hegel as the quintessential monistic idealist, and then proceeds to proclaim to have discovered the "non-dialecticizable fourth term" of the dialectic triad, which Hegel himself somehow failed to see.[42] We could certainly give a credible argument as to the existence of this

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[42] Slavoj Zizek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, (London: Verso, 1991). See especially the first section of chapter five, entitled: "Why Should A Dialectician Learn to Count to Four?"

Hegel of "Absolute Knowledge," given some of the appallingly bad claims he makes about the cultures of non-European others in *The Philosophy of History*. But the question is not so much whether or not these readers who attempt to produce a Hegel who fetishizes an all-encompassing "Absolute Knowledge" are correct in their readings of his texts, but what the consequences are for reading him in such a fashion, particularly since, as Zizek attempts to show, Hegel himself did not subscribe to such a conception of Absolute Knowledge. For if Hegel's dialectic is a sort of totalizing monster which, once set free, devours all phenomena in its path, then we ought to expect that the future will consist of a globalized monoculture, reveling in the enlightened bliss of Absolute Knowledge.

Fortunately, there is another interpretive possibility. Slavoj Zizek rereads Hegel as a philosopher who could count to *four* and who was thus fully aware that the final, and most important moment of the dialectic was not the traditionally feted third moment of synthesis, but the power of negativity itself— the zero space wherein the power of contradiction is itself given positivity. There is nothing teleologically deterministic about Zizek's Hegel, nothing which drives the fulgurations of Spirit inexorably toward Absolute Knowledge and World-Spirit. For Zizek, the power of Hegelian dialectics resides precisely in the power of negativity, as that driving moment in the dialectic which acts as a motor to the dialectical process. The failure, in reading Hegel, to notice this moment of pure negativity as positivity can only produce a deterministic "straw" position, causing us to lose "the unfathomable surplus of the pure difference which

'counts for nothing,' although it makes the entire process go, this 'void of the substance' which is at the same time the 'receptacle' for all and everything."[43]

Although those readers of Hegel who insist upon the deterministic Hegel as the true Hegel might very well be right to read him in such a fashion, I find Zizek's reading to be far more compelling because, the Hegel of "pure difference" has a great deal more to contribute to sociopolitical analysis than the standard monistic Hegel. Reading Hegel as the idealist apologist for Western expansionism reduces his insights into the concepts of difference and contradiction to the mere expressions of an ideologue who ultimately is interested in difference only to subsume it within the interpretive frameworks of the West. It is more fruitful to determine just how much of Hegel's insights into the dialectic of self and other can be utilized in the development of a politics which works against, not with, the historical logics of domination with which we are seemingly saddled. Following Zizek's interpretation then, I want to understand Hegelian dialectics as grounded, not in the positive moment of synthesis, but in the positivity of negativity, the moment of pure difference. The reason for this is because I suspect that when we examine Hegel's coming to terms with Chinese culture and thought, we will find that it is this moment of confrontation with the pure difference of the Chinese which forces Hegel into the position of reaffirming the possibility of European philosophy's self-consciousness. In dealing with Hegel's understanding and pronouncements on the culture and philosophy of the Chinese then, I do not intend merely to point out the "false facts" he produces, correcting them with the truth. Rather, I wish to examine how what Hegel has to say about the Chinese and their culture might be seen as a certain

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[43] Slavoj Zizek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, (London: Verso, 1991), p. 182.

movement in philosophical Spirit— to locate Hegel in his own history and to produce a reading of Hegel which will allow us to grasp what is at stake in the philosophical encounter between West and East. What I wish to show is how Hegel himself, particularly in his readings of the history of other, non-European cultures, becomes trapped within a perception of the Chinese, a perception which precisely forces him, and European philosophy, to a transformed level of self-consciousness which is not possible without the consciousness, first, of the radically different cultural other.

4.8 The Hegelian Chinese

For Hegel, History itself begins with the Chinese who, although they possess the distinction of marking the emergence of History, nonetheless remain "frozen" in the specific constellation of the generative moment of the historical process. He opens his discussion of China with the following:

> With the Empire of China History has to begin, for it is the oldest, as far as history gives us any information; and its *principle* has such substantiality, that for the empire in question it is at once the oldest and the newest. Early do we see China advancing to the condition in which it is found at this day; for as the contrast between objective existence and subjective freedom of movement in it, is still wanting, every change is excluded, and the fixedness of a character which recurs perpetually, takes the place of what we should call the truly historical.[44]

Thus the presence of the Chinese in Hegel's world is as a frozen anachronism— a miraculously preserved relic from the beginnings of History which, paradoxically, is *not* historical because it is not self-transcending. The Chinese "principle" lacks the motor of self-consciousness which propels Spirit forward in its manifestations. We recognize here

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[44] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, J. Sibree, trans., (New York: Dover, 1956), p. 116.

as well the all-too-familiar elements which typically "characterize" Chinese culture— its age, its lack of change, its stolid stability. This stability, however, is not maintained just by the military might of the emperor's army and the external threat of force for, as we see here, the peculiar stability of the Chinese lies within the ordering principle of their society, which prevents change because it is ultimately nothing more than a lifeless moment in the evolution of Spirit.

The Chinese state, as a manifestation of this principle, is equally fixed in its structure, and Hegel identifies it as a "despotism" wherein the Sovereign represents pure Substantiality, the Law made real in the body of a human. Since, for Hegel, the proper form of obedience to the rule of law occurs only after the subject of the law has made the law its own, that is, internalized its reason as a moment of its own consciousness,[45] the juridical structure of Chinese society simply reflects the state of consciousness to which the Chinese have attained and which they will never transcend. Consequently, no Chinese possesses a proper subjectivity beyond immediate self-consciousness:

> The element of Subjectivity— that is to say, the reflection upon itself of the individual will in antithesis to the Substantial (as the power in which it is absorbed) or the recognition of this power as *one with its own essential being*, in which it knows itself *free*— is not found on this grade of development. The universal Will displays its activity immediately through that of the individual: the latter has no self-cognizance at all in antithesis to Substantial, positive being, which it does not yet regard as a power standing over it....[46]

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[45] I recognize that Hegel's argument here is more complex, and his dialectical conception of law more complicated, but for my purposes, I think this summary, although reductive, doesn't alter the general thrust of his argument in Section VI of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where he writes (of a stage through which Spirit passes) that "This Spirit can be called the human law, because it is essentially in the form of a reality that is conscious of itself," p. 267.
[46] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, A. V. Miller, trans., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 120.

The Chinese are thus mindless cogs within a social machine: they perform their tasks, they fulfill the roles expected of them, but they do so without self-consciousness. Thus, the relationship of the Chinese to their ruler is not the relationship of citizens to government which characterizes the European social order. The operating principle of the Chinese social order is properly that of the Family: "The Chinese regard themselves as belonging to their family, and at the same time as the Children of the State."[47]

In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel identifies the Family as the first, immediate stage of social existence. In the case of Europe where self-consciousness does exist, the Family ultimately negates itself by producing children who become self-conscious individuals capable of being citizens.[48] But what sense can we make of this with respect to the Chinese? In the *Phenomenology*, the transformation of Spirit from the form of the Family to the form of the Nation is a *necessary* movement, generated by the contradiction which self-conscious Spirit encounters. What the Chinese state becomes, then, is a lifeless manifestation of Spirit writ large, wherein the motive force embodied by European societies simply does not exist. It is stuck in a changeless time, sealed within the fixtures of its own, unchanging principle. For Hegel, every structure and characteristic of Chinese society reaffirms the lifelessness of the Chinese spirit, whether it be the government, the administrative structures, religion, philosophy, or language. In the concrete realities of Chinese existence, a circle of ossification exists, in

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[47] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, A. V. Miller, trans., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 121.

[48] Hegel writes: "The Family, as the *unconscious*, still inner Notion [of the ethical order], stands opposed to its actual, self-conscious existence; as the element of the nation's actual existence, it stands opposed to the nation itself," *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, A. V. Miller, trans., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 268.

which the stability of the Chinese principle produces cultural forms which impede progress, thereby supporting the societal principle which in turn maintains stagnant cultural forms.

Interestingly enough, Hegel recognizes the existence of "philosophy" in Chinese culture, but although he recognizes in the "Y-King"[49] the "purely abstract ideas of Unity and Duality," he nevertheless maintains that Chinese Philosophy is nonetheless a stillborn moment in the history of European thought: "the Philosophy of the Chinese appears therefore to proceed from the same fundamental ideas as that of Pythagoras."[50] But whereas the development of European philosophy carried it from these simplistic, basic musings into the development of the sophisticated philosophical systems of Hegel's time, the metaphysical ideas of the Chinese were developed so that they believe:

> that he who is acquainted with Reason, possesses an instrument of universal power, which may be regarded as all-powerful, and which communicates a supernatural might; so that the possessor is enabled by it to exalt himself to Heaven, and is not subject to death (much the same as the universal Elixir of Life once talked of among us).[51]

What is curious about this mode of differentiating Chinese philosophy from the European is that without the parenthetical remark which alludes to "unscientific" superstition, the statement would do very well as a postmodernist critique of the *European* philosophy of Hegel's time. The fact that Hegel renders the Chinese word *dao* as "Reason" is significant as well, in that for Hegel, Reason "is Spirit when its certainty of being all

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[49] Hegel's rendition of *I Ching*, or *Yi Jing*.
[50] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, J. Sibree, trans., (New York: Dover, 1956), p. 136.
[51] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, J. Sibree, trans., (New York: Dover, 1956), p. 136.

reality has been raised to truth, and it is conscious of itself as its own world, and of the world as itself."[52] In other words, the Chinese philosophical obsession with "dao" or "Reason" reaffirms Hegel's conceptualization of the Chinese as an eternally static moment of Spirit. For since Reason must become *self-conscious* in order to become Spirit, the Chinese immutability is evidenced even in the abstract and metaphysical texts and thought of the Taoists.

As for Confucius, his work is seen by Hegel as containing "a circumlocution, a reflex character, and circuitousness in the thought, which prevents it from rising above mediocrity."[53] I would argue that aside from the form of Confucius' thought, Hegel also believes Confucius to be mediocre in terms of content. For if Confucius' work consists primarily of "correct moral apophthegms," then Confucius is simply another cultural manifestation of the ethical structure of Chinese society, in which laws are not made internal (this would require self-consciousness) but are instead mandated from without, thus producing a civil society in which "All legal relations are definitely settled by rules; free sentiment— the moral standpoint generally— is thereby thoroughly obliterated."[54] Without a subjective aspect, wherein the law is internalized, the Chinese do not possess the possibility of being moral; they simply follow their "determinate duties" and obligations.

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[52] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, A. V. Miller, trans., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 263.
[53] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, J. Sibree, trans., (New York: Dover, 1956), p. 136.
[54] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, J. Sibree, trans., (New York: Dover, 1956), p. 128.

Finally, like Leibniz, Hegel subscribes to the idea that the Chinese lack science, although unlike Leibniz, he attributes this lack of science to the inherent limitations of the Chinese language, which is unsuited for the development of scientific theories because the Chinese do not possess any "true scientific interest."[55] Once again, this lack of science (which for Hegel is something more than purely empirical studies, something he cedes to the Chinese) is reflective of the stalled dialectic: "A free, ideal, spiritual kingdom has here no place. What may be called scientific is of a merely empirical nature, and is made absolutely subservient to the Useful on behalf of the State— its requirements and those of individuals."[56] Without self-consciousness, the Chinese have certainly developed ways of understanding and managing the external world. But here, unlike European science, Chinese "science" is purely functional— it is a pragmatic concern which, failing to grasp the truth of the world, discerns only that which is socially useful.

4.9 The Stalled Ontology

Obviously, there are few "facts" in the Hegelian perception of China and Chinese thought which are not overlaid with the arrogance of Eurocentrism. But simply stopping here would miss the more subtle undertones of what is happening in Hegel's China and the possibilities embedded here. First, let us note that the Hegelian China is *stuck in time*. The confident progression of Spirit in the *Phenomenology* is evident in *The Philosophy of History*, but only when Hegel gets to Europe. The rest, Chinese, Indian, Persian, and Greek civilizations, are all superseded moments of European *past*. It is, of

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[55] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, J. Sibree, trans., (New York: Dover, 1956), p. 134.
[56] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, J. Sibree, trans., (New York: Dover, 1956), p. 134.

course, only by identifying other cultures which represent the European past which enables Europe's situation in the present. For without some index by which to do the work of cultural dating, there is no scale by which to assert the advanced nature of European society. But unlike the rest of the world and the superseded moments of the past which exist only as various forms of historical record, Chinese civilization is unique in that it *still persists*, despite (or precisely because of) its failure to make the dialectical development to self-consciousness. Thus, Hegel's conceptualization of the world of the Chinese comprehends it as *non-coeval*. That is, China exists in its own time, within a state of suspended animation wherein the movement of spirit has stalled.[57] Second, we must notice that Hegel gives no explanation as to why this dialectical impasse should exist. Reading the *Phenomenology*, one is given no strong reasons to believe that the evolution of Spirit he traces there would be the description of a specific culture. But unless Hegel is going to claim that the Chinese are not, after all *human* (a claim he might, in fact, be making), we have no reason for understanding this inability of the dialectic to generate self-consciousness. After all, is not the dialectic driven by a certain *necessity?*

Hegel marks the difference of the Chinese, not so much in terms of distance (i.e. the Chinese inhabit a world at the extreme far edge of the continent and so on) but in temporal terms. And as such, the Chinese provide an extremely useful example of the earliest stages which Spirit must overcome on its path to becoming Europe. In a manner

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[57] Rey Chow, in her book *Primitive Passions*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 194, critiques precisely this understanding of the "time of the other" as part of the deadlock of contemporary cultural studies, arguing instead that critiquing the "great disparity" between European and non-European cultures entails reconfiguring *both* the notion of alterity and of the origin itself.

akin to anthropologists who believed that they are able to discover, in so-called "primitive" tribes, the preservation of the earliest cultural patterns of human history, Hegel here utilizes a particular conception of the Chinese in order to bolster the theoretical development of his philosophical system. Since it is Hegel who is doing the theorizing here, and not a Chinese Neo-Confucianist, then clearly the philosophical vantage point of Europe is far superior to that of China— European philosophy is capable, in a way which Chinese philosophy cannot, of unearthing the meaning of other cultures.

But if the Chinese dialectic is stalled, does not the mere presence of the Chinese, as a heavy anachronistic mass of non-self-conscious people, confront the "developed Spirit" of Europe with its own contradiction? For if it is the case that the power of Spirit lies in "looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it. This tarrying with the negative is the magical power that converts it into being,"[58] then European philosophy's self-consciousness, its self-understanding as being something more than the sum of the truths it has produced, emerges, not from a confrontation with itself, but with its identification of its own, proper Other, that frozen moment which it had supposedly long ago transcended. Indeed, the "truth" of philosophy "includes its negative also, what would be called the false, if it could be regarded as something from which one might abstract."[59] Thus, in order for European philosophy to move to the next level in the dialectical progression, it *must* identify and confront what appears to it to be radically

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[58] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, A. V. Miller, trans., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 19.
[59] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, A. V. Miller, trans., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 27.

other, since this confrontation is the only thing which can force the emergence of the next moment of Spirit's unfolding.

But what of the other here, of the Chinese moment which, after its dialectical confrontation with European philosophy as a superseded moment of its own dialectical evolution, is seemingly included within European philosophy? Does it vanish? Is it simply incorporated within the body of European philosophy as a moment of the neutralized antagonism represented by the presence of the other, absorbed into the present of European thought? Or does its silent, anachronistic presence point to the arbitrariness of the identification of European philosophy as "philosophy proper?" The Hegelian encounter with Chinese philosophy can thus be seen as a historical moment where European philosophy believed it had encountered its own transcended past and incorporated it, classifying the principle underlying Chinese thought as simply a primitive moment in the dialectical development of European philosophy and thus readily explained and absorbed. But as Hegel himself observed, historical truths are "concerned with a particular existence, with the contingent and arbitrary aspects of a given content, which have no necessity."[60] In the time that has passed since Hegel's attempt to incorporate the Chinese other, the Chinese negative, much has transpired. In the next chapter, I will attempt to address the unkept promises of the principle of Western thought and civilization, but given that Hegel's account of history is often criticized for its ahistoricity, its idealism, what should we expect to find when we examine materialist

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[60] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, A. V. Miller, trans., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 23.

accounts of the difference between cultures, as evidenced in the thought of Marx, the very founder of materialist dialectics?

4.10 States of Decay: the Asiatic "Mummy"

Although Marx might have believed that he had "turned Hegel on his head," what we discover when he examines non-European societies is that he has cheated in his handstand— he has only gone halfway. For just as Hegel, in his reading of the non-European, simply absorbs it into the dialectic of ideas by identifying Chinese society in its essence as merely a transcended stage of European development, we could see Marx as relegating the socio-economic peculiarities of non-European societies to the status of being outmoded, "pre-historical moments" of materialist dialectics. China, India, Mexico, North Africa, all of these are merely relics and remnants of essentially pre-capitalist economic formations which have had the misfortune not to have reached the advanced capitalist stage attained by the European powers. As these "primitive" states find themselves coming increasingly into contact and conflict with the powers of Europe, they will find it correspondingly more and more difficult to resist assimilation or colonization. European capitalist formations are thus the materialist motor of historical progress and as the active representation of socio-economic development are thus *the* social and cultural powers to be reckoned with.

But although Marx sees himself as providing a corrective antidote to Hegelian idealism which allows for the theoretical capture of the true essence of historical change, he nonetheless falls into the same mode of coming to terms with the non-European other to which Hegel succumbed. As a result, Marx provides us with another mode of understanding Chinese difference, one located in the antiquity of the Chinese *economic*

formation and not in the frozen principles of Chinese *ideas*. Ultimately however, despite the reorientation of the primary theoretical assumptions, we are led to much the same conclusion. Whereas for Hegel the stagnation and ossification of Chinese society is inherent in its *principle*, for Marx the ideas of a society do not precede its material existence and the manner in which it reproduces itself— the thought of the Chinese can thus be read as a shadowy reflection of the ideology which was necessary for the material reproduction of Chinese society. Given this shift in philosophical prioritization then, we need to address what Marx understood to be the materiality of Chinese society. But before we can anticipate what Marx might have to say on the topic of Chinese philosophy, we need to address Marx's conceptualization of the economics of Chinese society and the notion of the Asiatic Mode of Production (hereafter abbreviated as AMP).

Marx's interest in China and the non-European was born out of his stint as a correspondent for the *New York Daily Tribune*. Assigned to cover the consequences of British foreign policy, Marx began writing a series of articles for the *New York Daily Tribune* on China and British foreign policy in 1853, and continued to do so until at least 1860.[61] The portrait of Chinese civilization which emerges from these articles is one in which China is always temporally "behind," always at a disadvantage, and always tinged with the metaphor of *decay*. Thus, China is: a "mummy" which has been brought into violent contact with the "open air" of British imperialism and which will, as a result,

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[61] See *Marx on China (1853-1860): Articles from the New York Daily Tribune*, Dona Torr, ed., (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968).

surely fall into "dissolution,"[62] "the rotting semi-civilization of the oldest State in the world,"[63] and "a giant empire, containing almost one-third of the human race, vegetating in the teeth of time."[64] In each of these descriptions of China, the metaphoric depiction of Chinese decay is counterposed with the active vitality of the British and their imperializing forces. Where Hegel's idealist account of Chinese thought merely rendered it a frozen principle without conjuring up specific images (what does a frozen principle look like?), Marx's metaphorical rendering is perhaps a bit more vivid, evoking unpleasant images of rotting foods and the stench of decomposition.

This identification of the European with "progress" and "vitality" and the non-European with "decay" and "stagnation" sets the tone for the understanding of those cultures themselves. For if the non-European is stagnant and rotten, then it is surely the result of the economic organization of these societies which produces this stagnation as an aftereffect of the attempt to reproduce its conditions of existence. This economic organization finds its legitimation and derives its social power from a "despotic" state—a government which is divorced from the rural sites of economic production and which controls the appropriation and distribution of the surplus produced there. This "Oriental despotism" is a stalled stage in the natural evolution of the human community in which some person, a "despot," occupies the empty position of the imagined unity of the

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[62] Karl Marx, "Revolution in China and Europe," *Marx on China (1853-1860): Articles from the New York Daily Tribune*, Dona Torr, ed., (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968), p. 4.
[63] Karl Marx, "Persia — China," *Marx on China (1853-1860): Articles from the New York Daily Tribune*, Dona Torr, ed., (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968), p. 45.
[64] Karl Marx, "Trade or Opium?" *Marx on China (1853-1860): Articles from the New York Daily Tribune*, Dona Torr, ed., (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1968), p. 55.

community and serves to make real this unity. As a result of this form of social organization, the shift in economic focus from countryside to town does not occur, and Asiatic states are left with an imagined collectivity of farming communes, each a mediated part of the "clan's" unity.[65]

This discussion requires some elaboration, for we shall see that this is ultimately the *economic* and not *ideal* basis upon which Marx grounds Asiatic stagnation and decay. First, the passage from the *Grundrisse* under discussion proceeds in a dialectical fashion similar to that of "The Ethical Order" in Hegel's *Phenomenology.* Only, for Marx, the dialectical evolution of the form of communality requires, not the generation of self-consciousness, but rather the transformation of the economic organization of the community. Thus, the difference between Asiatic communality and the second form, that (presumably European) "product of more active, historic life" consists of the economic focus of the community which in turn produces the necessary conditions for a transformation of consciousness. Within the Asiatic community, the economic focus is upon the rural agricultural village as the site of production, whereas in the European form, the economic focus is upon the commerce which occurs in the town, removed from the rural areas.[66] This delineation of two alternate forms of communal existence before the emergence of feudalism could be read in two ways. First, one could argue that there is a progression here, from the Asiatic *to* the European, from rural-based to urban-based economies. Alternatively, and I believe, more accurately, one might

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[65] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, (New York: Vintage, 1973), pp. 472-474.
[66] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 474.

contend that both the Asiatic and the European are meant to be seen as alternate pathways out of the first mode of "clan community."

The first reason for adopting the latter reading of Marx's conceptualization of the Asiatic communal form is simply a close reading of Marx's text. He writes:

> The second form [of communality]— and like the first it has essential modifications brought about locally, historically, etc.— product of more active, historic life, of the fates and modifications of the original clans— also assumes the *community* as its first presupposition, but not, as in the first case, as the substance of which the individuals are mere accidents, or of which they form purely natural component parts— it presupposes as base not the countryside, but the town as an already created seat (centre) of the rural population....[67]

This non-Asiatic communal form situates the town as the economic center of social organization, whereas in the Asiatic form, the town is merely accidental, forming "only at exceptionally good points for external trade."[68] Thus it is the exigencies of the location of economic communities which is primarily responsible for the path of their development.

Another reason for reading the two modes of communality as non-unilinear is that the Asiatic mode is described as a form in which the farming communes "vegetate independently alongside one another" while the non-Asiatic mode is characterized by the internal drive to *develop*. For since it is in the non-Asiatic mode that we encounter private property, the more this is developed, "the more, further, the clan removes itself from its original seat and occupies *alien* ground, hence enters into essentially new conditions of labour, and develops the energy of the individual more...."[69] Given this

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[67] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 474.
[68] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 474.
[69] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 475.

understanding of the two modes then, it would appear logically impossible that the Asiatic form would ever evolve into the second form, since the Asiatic form is always already limited by its internal principle from developing the forms of private property necessary for the dialectical evolution of societal organization. The non-Asiatic form, on the other hand, since it does possess the characteristic of private ownership of property, can thus generate the internal contradictions necessary for progression to feudal society (and ultimately, of course, to the even more advanced structures of capitalism and communism).

Thus, unlike Hegel, Marx provides us with a material basis for understanding Chinese[70] stagnation, although ultimately the meaning of Chinese society *is* material stagnation. The economic forms which the Chinese developed, due to "various external, climatic, geographic, physical, etc. conditions as well as... their particular natural predisposition— their clan character"[71] are what maintains the "will to vegetate" which animates Chinese society. But even given the shift in focus, from "principle" to "material conditions," is there not something suspicious in the appeal, at the very last to some notion of Chinese (or, more accurately, Asiatic) *character?* For is not this "character" simply the Hegelian "principle" linked to a social and material specificity? Are then the Asiatics thus inherently limited, doomed to mummification, because of who they *are*?

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[70] I recognize that I have here shifted from discussions of "societies characterized by the Asiatic mode of production" to "Chinese society," but since Chinese society is, for Marx, clearly included within the class of societies which could be called "Asiatic," this shift is not a conceptual error, but just a shift in focus.

[71] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, (New York: Vintage, 1973), p. 472.

The consequences of this, are of course, politically difficult to accept. For since it is the non-Asiatic mode which is driven to inhabit "*alien* ground," then is it not precisely the case that the economic wanderlust of European imperialism is necessary to shake up the intrinsic static nature of non-European societies, propelling them out of existence in the changeless, eternal limbo of the frozen and transcended past of world history and back onto the tracks of dialectical progress? Indeed, elsewhere, with reference to India, yet another example of a "undignified, stagnatory, and vegetative life," Marx writes that contact with the imperialist violence of the British is fundamentally necessary as a condition for social change:

> England, it is true, in causing a revolution in Hindostan, was actuated only by the vilest interests, and was stupid in her manner of enforcing them. But that is not the question. The question is, can mankind fulfill its destiny without a fundamental revolution in the social state of Asia? If not whatever may have been the crimes of England she was the unconscious tool of history in bringing about the revolution.[72]

The stagnating, self-absorbed "Asiatic" societies thus "require" the influence of imperialist capitalist nations in order to rejuvenate themselves, shedding their old, outmoded forms the way a "mummy in a hermetically sealed coffin" disintegrates into dust upon contact with the air it has been protected from for centuries.

Marx's notion of the AMP thus guarantees the primitivity of non-European states at the same time that it renders necessary the intervention of European states to break the mold of unchanging eternity which encapsulates them. The AMP is subsequently characterized by Marx as a primitive stage in the evolution of economic organization,

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[72] Karl Marx, "The British Rule in India," *Marx on Colonialism and Modernization*, Shlomo Avineri, ed., (New York: Anchor, 1968), p. 94.

which culminates in the "modern bourgeois mode of production."[73] But the most striking aspect of Marx's conceptualization of the AMP is its lack of *private property in land*, such that it could be viewed almost as a primitive form of communism.[74] For if it is the aim of Marx's history is to show how, through a series of dialectical movements, the relationship between humans and private property moves from the absence of private property to its necessity and then finally to its negation again, then why would the possibility that the societies characterized by the AMP might be closer to communism that the capitalist states of Marx's time never arise? Why would Marx so quickly conclude that societies characterized by the AMP were simply lost in their own stagnation, instead of considering the possibility that the forms of property within the AMP might represent a step *beyond* capitalist relations? The answer to this perhaps lies in the fact that these societies were easily dominated by the Europeans, such that those who conquer always represent the more advanced, more powerful. The weak, of course, are always the backward.

But the point of this excursion has not been to demonstrate that Marx was Eurocentrist. Rather, it was to show that since Marx was not free from a certain mode of perceiving non-European others, he is subsequently *blocked* from considering other

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[73] Marx writes, "In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as epochs marking progress in the economic development of society. The bourgeois mode of production is the last antagonistic form of the social process of production...." *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1970), p. 21.

[74] Marx writes, in a letter to Engels on 2 June 1853, that "On the formation of Oriental cities one can read nothing more brilliant, graphic and striking than old Francois Bernier.... Bernier correctly discovers the basic form of all phenomena in the East... to be the *absence of private property* in land. This is the real key even to the Oriental heaven...."

theoretical possibilities. In addition, the mode of cultural perception which this cursory examination of Marx seems to elicit is that of the forcefit— having developed a theory to explain the development of human society, Marx is hard-pressed to give it up when confronted with data which simply do not fit his theory. Given the handy defeat at the hands of the British fleet, it is perhaps easier to simply view Chinese society as an outmoded historical possibility, instead of confronting head-on the meaning of the utter difference which the Chinese (and indeed, most non-European societies) seem to represent theoretically. As Marx has captured the materiality of Chinese society within the strictures of his theory, we already suspect that, had he written specifically on the philosophy of the Chinese, he would have characterized it too as stagnant, the frozen/ossified ideological reflections of a stagnant Chinese economic order.

4.11 The Chinese Ideology

In *The German Ideology,* Marx describes the historical development of the forces of production, to show that rather than being a *consequence* of the development of the historical idea, they rather *preceded* it. Instead of consciousness instantiating itself in various material forms, these forms are what generate corresponding forms of consciousness.[75] This is, of course, a familiar aspect of Marxian theory. The task before us here is to generate, from this, what Marx's conceptualization of what the *Chinese* ideology might be, given that the discussion in *The German Ideology* is limited to the development of European societies. Further, what merits discussion are the

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[75] Marx writes, "Consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all." *The German Ideology*, (New York: International Publishers, 1970), p. 51.

consequences of our intuited version of Marx on Chinese philosophy for philosophical interaction between the philosophies of West and East.

First, since the Asiatic mode of production is characterized by inertia and a resistance to change, Chinese thought must be so as well. In fact, since "Men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas, etc..."[76] and Chinese "men" are trapped within a historical mode of production which gravitates away from change and has remained unchanged for centuries, Chinese thought must possess the same characteristic. Marx writes:

> Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness, thus no longer retain the semblance of independence [from material existence]. They have no history, no development; but men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking. Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.[77]

And if this is the case, then Chinese thought *does not change,* since the material conditions of Chinese existence do not change. The Chinese are simply doomed to reproduce, within the unending confines of a social closed circuit, the same ideas. So long as they remained trapped within the Asiatic mode of production, the Chinese are compelled to an endless repetition.

Further, the form which Chinese philosophy takes will work to reproduce the Chinese society from which it emerges. But if Chinese society is correctly understood to be "Oriental despotism," wherein individuals see themselves as possessing a relationship to the unity of the group made real in the figure of the despot (emperor), then Chinese

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[76] Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, (New York: International Publishers, 1970), p. 47.
[77] Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, (New York: International Publishers, 1970), p. 47.

philosophy will take the form of being an endless series of paeans and rationalizations of the despotic order. Consequently, the fate of Chinese thought is also to be caught within an infinitely repeating cycle: the Asiatic mode of production generates a mode of thought which reinforces the Asiatic mode of production, and so on. What could possibly break this endless repetition?

The answer is, of course, the introduction of external ideas, concomitant with the introduction of external modes of production. To call it an introduction is, however, to be politically disingenuous, since this is tantamount to claiming that the Chinese *need* some form of cultural imperialism to drive their thought out of the quicksand of Asiatic ideology. This admonition is particularly difficult to accept, given our contemporary fetish of "respect for the other." But it is, nonetheless, an inescapable consequence of accepting Marx's diagnosis of the material realities of Chinese society. Indeed, given the lack of structural change which accompanied the "introduction" of Buddhism into China, one might argue even more strongly that a period of colonization is ineluctably necessary, in order to produce the material changes which must serve as the real bases for a change in ideology.

But what we have discovered here is still, paradoxically, nothing new. These conceptualizations of Chinese society— its static, unchanging character, the primarily ideological function of its "philosophy" as a mode for justifying and perpetuating the continued existence of the Chinese state, are all descriptions of Chinese thought which we find even now. We have thus moved from an understanding of Chinese thought, marked by Leibniz, where Chinese thought is seen as fundamentally compatible with European thought but still in need of European enlightenment, to a position where,

although European thought is still needed for the development of Chinese thought, Chinese thought is fundamentally *opposed* to the bases of European thought.

In light of these considerations, the question of cultural "contact" becomes unavoidable, for not only is Marxism the official state philosophy of the contemporary Chinese state, but contact with the West brought other philosophies as well. But what sort of meaning could this cultural contact have? If, in the very determination of the contours of Chinese thought, it is relegated to existence as an anachronism, this communication is foreclosed. The only workable possibilities entail some form of colonization, whether this is anchored on the truth of Christian texts or the intellectual and material advancement of Western thought and ideals. Part of the suggestion here is thus that the success or failure of "intercultural" (philosophical) communication requires first of all the abandonment of conceptualizations of the cultural other which maintain, on one level or another, that the other exists in an other space and an other time. The assertion of cultural difference on these grounds and the recognition of other cultures which is grounded in spatio-temporal alterity is destined to deny, at the outset, the very attempt to recognize the other. For if the other is so very far away, the other could only be, in the terms of the metaphor of visuality, *indistinct*.

CHAPTER 5

CHINESE PROMISES

5.1 The Other's Borders

> A moment ago we were saying, in effect, that a philosophical discourse or discussion always bore in a certain way on the limit of the philosophical, on the border between what is philosophical and what is not… we feel strongly the seriousness of the question of whether philosophy was born in Greece or not, whether it is European or not, whether one can speak of Chinese philosophy, whether one can speak of African philosophy, or whether the destination of philosophy is marked by a singular language or a network of singular languages…. Which means that, at the same time, one feels led to reaffirm that *philosophia* has a Greek or Greco-European source with all the consequences that that entails, and inversely, since philosophy is the question of its own limit within itself, then at that moment there is not only no reason that precisely the non-European may not accede to philosophy, but no reason that the non-European may not be the place of the philosophical question about philosophy.
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> —Jacques Derrida, "Passages— From Traumatism to Promise"

Derrida's philosophical task has always been to locate, beneath the presence of the claim to truth, the subtle workings of the assumptions necessary to make those claims which undermine their veracity. This method of philosophical deconstruction, when centered upon philosophical praxis itself, encounters the limits of philosophy. What is to count as philosophy if philosophy as such is concerned with everything? Certain schools of Anglo-American philosophy tend to emphasize that the philosophical project is concerned with conceptual analysis and the elucidation of propositions, all the while blissfully (and perhaps willfully) ignorant that the methodological tools they employ are derived from the logical analysis of the *English* language. This type of blindness leads, of course to the strange claims made with respect to the thought and culture of the other as witnessed in the discussion of Brannigan in chapter two. But it also leads to a certain

instability in the boundaries of what is to count as philosophical discourse. Derrida is thus led, in the passage cited above, to suggest that philosophical theorizing is always concerned with effacing the "wound" testifying to the trauma of its emergence.[1] In the case of our present focus, the notion of cultural difference and its utilization as the grounds for a philosophical cartography, the point here is not to prove that Chinese philosophy is valid *as philosophy*, for as suggested, the valorization of Chinese thought as philosophy ascribes to it the paradoxical status of being simultaneously both philosophy *and* non-philosophy, surely an unbearable contradiction. Furthermore, the need for this valorization succumbs to the problematic it wishes to redress. For though the attempt to "recognize" Chinese thought as philosophy perhaps has its benign origins in the desire to affirm the cultural other, the claim that these culturally other modes of thought are "truly philosophy after all" and the deployment of axiologies and demonstrations that the ancient Chinese had their own versions of utilitarianism simply translates into the Westernization of the world; everything is ultimately "just like it is here."

The resolution of this problem lies, not in the determination of the proper status of Chinese thought, but rather in the analysis of what is at work in the philosophical desire which generates this contradiction. What lies behind the desire to demarcate certain philosophies as lying outside the limits of the Western? What confers the status, beyond the purely contingent features (such as the language it is written/spoken in, the

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[1] Although he does not develop further his analysis of the relation between philosophies of the West and non-West, see his remarks about the philosophical effacement of its origin in *Points: Interviews, 1974-1994*, Elizabeth Weber, ed., Peggy Kamuf et. al., trans., (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), especially pp. 372-395.

nation-state in which it is written/spoken, etc.) of Western, Chinese, etc.? What is effaced in the desire to maintain that Western philosophy as such is distinct from that other, Chinese philosophy? The previous two chapters have argued that the conferral of cultural alterity and the displacement of Chinese society and thought is accomplished by means of a spatial and temporal distancing which establishes a fundamental separation between two spheres of culture. Once accomplished, this separation, far from being recognized as the work of a theoretical act, is maintained as a fact of the world. But once the facticity of this separation is called into question, the suggestion arises that Western self-identity, far from being an immediate, given self-consciousness, is instead the result of a historical process of grappling with the question of the other. This process is predicated upon the manner in which the West has been able to pick out and determine those who are to be identified as its others: the act of classification has profound consequences. But this positioning of the other does not simply result in the other's pure victimization: the practices which work to demonstrate that the other is an anachronistic society located at the end of the earth opposite from the West are also constitutive of the West's own self-identity. Being able to identify the other and to delineate its characteristics— these acts locate the *identifier* in a position of theoretical supremacy. Consequently we have seen a sort of "self-confirmation" at work in the texts of "Western" philosophers as they have sought to apprehend the non-Western, a self-confirmation which is paradoxical in that this Westernness is generated by the very act of classifying the non-Western. For Leibniz, Hegel, and Marx, the ability to locate the frozen social structures of the Chinese put them in the more advanced culture and thus

compelled them to assume the mantle of being representatives of the pinnacles of human innovation.

Certainly, the thinkers of the nineteenth century lived in the heyday of the Industrial age, when optimism ran high as to the possibilities inherent within the West's technological and social developments (even though, of course, there were pessimists like Nietzsche who were always spoiling these inflated self-images). It was possible then to believe that concomitant with the conquest of the globe was the incontrovertible proof of Western superiority, whether one saw this as a mission from the Christian God or simply a dialectical necessity. But with the onset of global wars and the wars of resistance fought against colonization came the unsettling suspicion that something was wrong, that perhaps the guiding principles of Western societies were *dangerous* as well as innovative. For the development of increasingly sophisticated weapons of war suggested, not the ushering in of the golden age of humanity, but perhaps the beginning of a long and painful era of protracted war. In this context, it is perhaps not unthinkable that Western thinkers would be driven to a revaluation of its own cultural principles, a revaluation made in light of the cultural principles of the non-Western societies which the West believed it had already superseded but which it had nonetheless incorporated. Colonization entails a necessary contamination of both cultures; neither is pure any longer.

But it will perhaps be said that this is all historical speculation. Is it not easier to claim that the cultural promises of the West were not simply the expressions of an anxiously self-assertive, historical moment, but rather the descriptions of the fact of really existing, cultural differences? Could one not claim that the West was simply too

eager to put what it had found into practice, and that Western expansionism was thus a form of impulsiveness? If the analysis given thus far is to attempt anything, it is to demonstrate that the naturalness of these cultural differences is anything *but* the expression of a simple, empirical fact, and that these differences are instead, consciously or not, *created.* But if this is the case, then what remains of the Western desire to identify its culture and differentiate it from that of the other, once this "Western" culture has been shown to be something stained with blood and tinged with the guilt of global devastation?

To be sure, this guilt is not meant to identify the poles of a dichotomous depiction of the non-West/West relation, whereby the West is always already *guilty* of "Orientalist" or "Imperialist" sins, while at the same time the "Oriental" position marks the location of the perennial yet innocent victim. Rather, the point here is that the very identification of the other has profound consequences for the self-understanding of the West. Thus, instead of the Imperialist West acting to subjugate the peoples of cultures other than itself, we find that the situation is such that the West, in attempting to come to terms with what it seems to be, comes into a measure of self-identification only through that attempt to reconcile itself with the presence of cultural others. The West's self-identification is possible only vis-à-vis the identification of a stable other which responds to the West as the mirror of its own self-presence.

It is in this context that China functions within the imagination of the philosophers of the early twentieth century who attempted to deal with the "problem of China." For it is these philosophers who must come to terms with the fact that not only is the West no longer the source of world-historical inspiration, but that the very ideas

spawned and propounded by the West are seemingly in need of serious revision. The idea of "scientific progress," for example, in the light of the development of the machinery of war, is hardly part of the process for the actualization of global harmony if utilized in the conflicts of world wars. But despite accusations of misuse and misapplication, certain Western ideas nonetheless seem to present themselves as truths, as the expressions of facts about the world or the actualization of an ideal world, which only a madman would deny. In our present time, in which liberal democracy has proclaimed the end of history and its victory as the truly viable form of representative government and human geneticists busy themselves with unraveling the cabalistic coding of human DNA, we find that these ideas which are supported and given their legitimacy by the fact that they have proven themselves historically "true"— democracy and science— are perhaps the only remaining unsullied ideas in the Western reservoir of global contributions. It is precisely these contributions which are to be examined in this chapter and the next. For if it is the case that democracy and science, far from being the harbingers of the golden era, are instead the preponderances of the historical logics of the past, then it is perhaps our duty to bring these under examination.

To sketch out a preliminary analysis, what we will find in the work of Dewey, Russell, and Beauvoir, the philosophical figures with whom this chapter is concerned, is that the West's relation to the Chinese other is that of a patient mentor, who seeks to guide the backward Chinese into a state of enlightenment. For Dewey and Russell, this position takes on the character of advocating various movements toward the development of democracy and the adoption of the methods of Western science. Beauvoir, given her Marxist orientation and writing in a period after Russell and Dewey,

sees the Chinese promise as the possibility that the Chinese can successfully create a communist society, where the promises of Marx are made real and reveal their historical truth. In all three cases, however, the "Chinese promise" consists of the hope that the Chinese can cash in all that is of value in the Western ideals of progress, democracy, and science, *without* committing the egregious acts of violence to which the West seems to be prone. Thus China represents a space where the West and Western ideas, having failed to live up to their potential and possibilities, can be tried again. China is another backdrop for the reenactment of the Western. But let us turn our attention to this triumvirate, to see whether what I have just sketchily argued finds support.

5.2 Dewey's Chinese Mission

> Ex-President Sun Yat-Sen is a philosopher, as I found out last night during dinner with him. He has written a book, to be published soon, saying that the weakness of the Chinese is due to their acceptance of the statement of an old philosopher, 'To know is easy; to act is difficult.' Consequently they did not like to act and thought it was possible to get a complete theoretical understanding.... So he has written a book to prove to his people that action really is easier than knowledge.
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> —John Dewey, from a letter to his daughter, written in Shanghai, May 13th, 1919.

While lecturing in Tokyo at the National Imperial University, John Dewey was approached by a small delegation of his Chinese former students who came to offer him a visiting professorship for the 1919-1920 academic year. Dewey accepted the offer, and proceeded to stay in China for two years, touring extensively and giving lectures on his favorite topics of philosophical interest— democracy, education, and the power of

the methodology of scientific inquiry formulated by Francis Bacon.[2] The delegation which approached him was headed by Hu Shih, a former doctoral student of Dewey's in philosophy at Columbia college who had subsequently become a professor of philosophy at National Beijing University.[3] Hu had prepared the way for Dewey's visit by giving a series of lectures on pragmatic philosophy and writing a series of articles published before Dewey's visit.[4] Because of Hu's work on behalf of Dewey, the visit itself was quite a success, in which many of Dewey's lectures drew thousands of audience members, not including those who had to be turned away for lack of standing room.

Since Dewey was generally regarded at the time as a preeminent "Western" philosophical figure at the cutting edge of philosophy (he was also the first foreigner to be invited to lecture at a Chinese university), it had been the hope of Hu and others who were members of the fledgling cultural reform movement[5] that Dewey's presence would lend support to their efforts to transform and modernize China by a drastic reconfiguration of what they felt was an outmoded culture, incapable of sustaining itself

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[2]For a detailed account of Dewey's visit to China and the specifics of his trip, see chapters one and two of Barry Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment in China: Educational Reform and Political Power in the Early Republic*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 7-51, as well as chapter ten of George Dykhuizen, *The Life and Mind of John Dewey*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1973), pp. 186-205.

[3] In a manner not unlike the training of graduate students as professional acolytes, Dewey's Chinese students returned to China eager to fulfill their mission of bringing the Western ideas of democracy and education to their home culture. Seeing the glowing reviews of their commitment to progress and solving China's problems with their newfound ideas in Thomas Berry, "Dewey's Influence in China," *John Dewey: His Thought and Influence*, John Blewett, ed., (New York: Fordham University Press, 1960).

[4] Barry Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment in China: Educational Reform and Political Power in the Early Republic*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 12.

[5] The same movement to which Lu Xun and Li Shicen (mentioned in chapter two) belonged, although their goals were very different from the goals of Hu and his associates.

in the post-World War world. Given that Dewey's visit coincided with the eruption of the May Fourth riots in Beijing, riots which were destined to become the archetype for future public protests (including the "pro-Democracy" movement in Tiananmen in 1989), Dewey's presence in China at the time served as a catalyst for sentiments of reform and change— sentiments which affixed themselves onto the twin myths of "Science" and "Democracy" as the pathways out of China's backwardness.[6]

Dewey himself understood well the historical moment in which he found himself. In one of the many articles he wrote for *The New Republic*, he proclaimed:

> Simply as an intellectual spectacle, a scene for study and surmise, for investigation and speculation, there is nothing in the world today— not even Europe in the throes of reconstruction— that equals China. History records no parallel. Can an old, vast, peculiar, exclusive, self-sufficing civilization be born again? Made over it must be, or it cannot endure.[7]

But if China is to be given a cultural makeover, this makeover is to be a *Western* one. Dewey hoped that by bringing in the Western ideas of science and democracy to a Chinese culture in the throes of a radical transformation, attempting to shed the last vestiges of a decayed imperial state apparatus, he could help to bring the developments of Western philosophy to bear upon the problems which Chinese society faced. This was in keeping with his understanding of what the philosophical project itself was, namely,

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[6] A view which is still dominant in the politics of resistance in China, as can be evidenced from the writings of the dissident physicist Fang Lizhi, who, in "Chinese Democracy: The View from the Beijing Observatory" writes that "The greatest contribution of the May Fourth and New Culture movements was to promote the absorption by Chinese culture of democracy and science, two things it has in short supply." *Bringing Down the Great Wall: Writings on Science, Culture, and Democracy in China*, (New York: Norton, 1990), p. 39.

[7] John Dewey, "Young China and Old," *Characters and Events*, Joseph Ratner, ed., (New York: Octagon, 1970), vol. one, p. 256.

that philosophy emerges from "the stresses and strains in community life" which demand a solution. "Philosophy" is simply the name given to the practice of attempting to solve the problems faced by society.[8] Thus, after meeting with Sun Yatsen, the "father" of the Republic of China, Dewey labeled him as a philosopher because of Sun's devotion to the solution of China's social and political problems.

This conception of philosophy put Dewey in good (Chinese) company, since almost 2500 years ago, the Confucian school of Chinese thought had attempted the same sort of enterprise, focusing on the advocacy of the correct philosophical principles which would help to restore the social order lost due to the absence of a strong centralized government in the Warring States period. In fact, during the first months of Dewey's visit, comparisons with Confucius were often explicitly made in introducing the philosopher to the crowds before which he was to speak. Since Chinese historians had calculated that Dewey's sixtieth birthday coincided with the exact birthdate of Confucius 2470 years earlier, Dewey's presence in China was interpreted as a propitious omen for positive change in China.[9] Dewey took full advantage of the influence he wielded, lecturing on the almost unimaginable possibilities of social change afforded by the adoption of Western methods of science and the political principles of democracy. Indeed, this adoption was presented as the only workable solution to Chinese problems.

But although Dewey advocated the Chinese adoption of Western science and its methods as part of the remedy of the problems faced by Chinese society in his time, what

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[8]See the introduction to *Reconstruction in Philosophy* for this conception of the philosophical enterprise.

[9] Barry Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment in China: Educational Reform and Political Power in the Early Republic*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 10-11.

he ultimately saw as fundamental was the adoption of the Western political philosophy of democracy. This is not to say that Dewey believed that Chinese culture was, before contact with the West, undemocratic. Rather, he believed that China merely lacked the "organs" by which a political democracy is sustained.[10] What, for Dewey, marked the fundamental contradiction of Chinese culture, then, was the contradiction between "her deepest traditions, her most established ways of thinking and feeling, her essential democracy," and the lack of the governmental apparatus which would permit the expression of this democracy.[11] Although he does not specifically identify the missing organs of the Chinese social body, one presumes that they would have to include such indispensable features as suffrage (universal or not) and the election of government officials.

In addition, Dewey considered the development of a system of democratic education as crucial to the modernization of China and to the successful integration of China into the sphere of West-dominated global politics. Only through a systematic evaluation of China's cultural heritage could those working for the transformation of China hope to achieve success, since part of the Deweyan conception of social reform consisted of a cultural experimentalism, utilizing aspects of the culture of the past to

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[10] Dewey writes, "For while China is morally and intellectually a democracy of a paternalistic type, she lacks the specific organs by which alone a democracy can effectively sustain itself either internally or internationally," "Transforming the Mind of China," *Characters and Events*, Joseph Ratner, ed., (New York: Octagon, 1970), vol. one, p. 292.

[11] "Transforming the Mind of China," in *Characters and Events*, (New York: Octagon, 1970), p.292.

benefit the present.[12] As a result, Dewey's conceptualization of the Chinese philosophies of Confucianism and Taoism focused on the immanence of these ways of thought within Chinese culture— the modernization of China will require that the specificity of the Chinese "philosophies of life" be reckoned with. With the establishment of the proper school systems and the judicious importation of Western ideas, "Young China" would develop into "a new culture, in which what is best in Western thought is to be freely adopted— but adapted to Chinese conditions, employed as an instrumentality in building up a rejuvenated Chinese culture."[13] The Western ideas of democracy and science are thus understood as merely tools. Developed within the West, they are nonetheless universally useful, adaptable to suit any cultural setting, where they may be deployed as the instrumentality for cultural advancement.

In and of itself, Dewey's attitudes toward the Chinese were unusual for his time, since the majority of "China-watchers" at the time were of the opinion that the Chinese were simply incapable of governing themselves. For Dewey to have advocated that the solutions to China's problems had to proceed from the Chinese was certainly admirable, even though it came as a consequence of his belief that the proper application of human intelligence was the only thing necessary for the development of the proper solution to most social and political problems.[14] But apart from Dewey's sense of cultural tolerance,

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[12] Barry Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment in China: Educational Reform and Political Power in the Early Republic*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 49.
[13] John Dewey, "New Culture in China," *Characters and Events*, Joseph Ratner, ed., (New York: Octagon, 1970), vol. one, p. 277.
[14] See the discussion in Thomas Berry, "Dewey's Influence in China," *John Dewey: His Thought and Influence*, John Blewett, ed., (New York: Fordham University Press, 1960), p. 225.

there are certain aspects of the Deweyan program which raise curious problems for the assessment of Dewey's democratic mission in China.

5.3 Cultural Difference and the Instantiability of Democracy

Situated at the end of World War One, Dewey clearly believed that the liberal ideal of democracy, as best represented in the social and political institutions of the United States, was the most viable form of political organization for the assured preservation of human freedom which manifests itself as "growth." He writes:

> Government, business, art, religion, all social institutions have a purpose. That purpose is to set free and to develop the capacities of human individuals without respect to race, sex, class, or economic status.... Democracy has many meanings, but if it has a moral meaning, it is found in resolving that the supreme test of all political institutions and industrial arrangements shall be the contribution they make to the all-round growth of every member of society.[15]

Democracy, coupled with the spirit of inquiry embodied in the scientific method, whereby disputes could be resolved by an appeal to empirical testing and observation, was to provide the basis for a new era of human civilization. Dewey saw democracy as central to the development of human society because it represented the transcending of the outmoded and despotic forms of government which restricted the benefits derived from scientific progress to those who, by virtue of their social position, were able to arrogate these for their own profit.[16]

But what is most puzzling about the notions of science and democracy which Dewey utilizes and attempts to instantiate is their seeming cultural "detachedness." Science and democracy may have arisen in the West as a result of a peculiar and

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[15] John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, (Boston: Beacon, 1957), p. 186.
[16] John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, (Chicago: Gateway, 1946), p. 174.

sociohistorically specific confluence of circumstances, but they seem to be detachable from the specificity of their cultural and historical origins. Like the historical importation of the concept of the zero from India to China in the eighth century, Dewey seems to think that the political and theoretical concepts of democracy and science can be successfully integrated within a culture in which they did not emerge and which is, furthermore, fundamentally *different*.

And thus we must once again take into account is an irreducible, assumed separation of Eastern and Western culture/philosophy. This separation is, for Dewey, the greatest of cultural differences. He writes:

> There are great differences in the mental dispositions of European and American peoples; the philosophies of life of even the English and Americans are much more unlike than they are usually assumed to be. But all such differences pale into insignificance as compared with the differences between the civilizations of the West and Asia— between the philosophies to which these civilizations have given birth.[17]

and elsewhere: "China *is* another world politically and economically speaking, a large and persistent world, and a world bound no one knows just where."[18]

Given this problematic dichotomization of the world, the question of cultural translation again emerges: if the difference between Asia and the West is so great, exactly how is it possible to instantiate *Western* science and democracy in a *Chinese* setting? Is not the adoption of Western democracy and science tantamount to the complete restructuring of China as a "Western" culture? For after all, the cultures of

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[17] John Dewey, "The Chinese Philosophy of Life," *Characters and Events*, Joseph Ratner, ed., (New York: Octagon, 1970), vol. one, p. 200.
[18] John Dewey, "Conditions for China's Nationhood," *Characters and Events*, Joseph Ratner, ed., (New York: Octagon, 1970), vol. one, p. 240.

China and the West represent the "greatest" of all cultural differences. What is it about democracy and science which transcends the specificity of the culture from which they emerged?

The answer to this lies, I suspect, in Dewey's assumption that notions like "democracy," "science," "freedom," "truth," etc., are understood to be universal *human* notions, delinked from their cultural origins. In other words, these ideas *transcend specific cultures*, escaping determination by the cultural spaces from which they emerged. Thus, the application of democracy, for example, simply requires that it be reworked into the existing structures of a society. Once accomplished, this democracy remains universal, in that it will still preserve a universally human freedom of expression and thought, despite its instantiation within a culture different from the culture of origin. Similarly, Western science can be adopted outside of the West because what it represents, namely, truth and knowledge of the natural (i.e. non-cultural) world, is presumed to be a universal value, free from the moorings of specific socio-cultural practices and ways of knowing. The universality of science as a directed activity which aims at the truth of the world catapults it outside of the pull of the gravity of culture and into the space of transcendence.

Are there then, perhaps, concepts which find their origin in the sphere of Chinese thought which possess a similar possible instantiation in West? In what, indeed, lies the specificity of Chinese culture? Or does the "greatest of all differences" lie merely in the fact that the contingency of history selected the West for the development of science and democracy while relegating the East to life without these universal values? For it would seem highly improbable that only the West was able to develop tools universally useful

for all humans, across all cultures. What can be detached from the specificity of the Chinese setting?

The primary marker of the cultural difference between the West and China seems for Dewey to be simply one of *density*. Dewey writes, "It is beyond question that many traits of the Chinese mind are the products of an extraordinary and long-continued density of populations."[19] The phenomenological fact of a life lived in close proximity to so many people, for Dewey, helps to explain the "conservatism" of the Chinese. For if one must live one's life always surrounded by others, the social fact of such a densely-populated existence must of course manifest itself in the development of a philosophy where "saving face," the preservation of one's social identity is paramount. Innovation and creativity thus take a position of secondary importance in the face of the all-important opinion of the others with whom one lives.

The fact of living is such close proximity to one's neighbors leads then to the *sense* of Chineseness:

> To be Chinese is not to be of a certain race nor to yield allegiance to a certain national state. It is to share with countless millions of others certain ways of feeling and thinking, fraught with innumerable memories and expectations because of long-established modes of adjustment and intercourse.[20]

This sense of Chinese community with which the Chinese seem to be singularly blessed would appear to work precisely against the emergence of the universalist political philosophy of democracy. For if what is most important for the instantiation of

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[19] John Dewey, "Chinese Social Habits," *Characters and Events*, Joseph Ratner, ed., (New York: Octagon, 1970), vol. one, p. 213.
[20] John Dewey, "Growth of National Chinese Sentiment," *Characters and Events*, Joseph Ratner, ed., (New York: Octagon, 1970), vol. one, p. 231.

democracy is a valuation of the growth of the individual in all its singularity, then Chinese social existence, which could be understood as predicated primarily upon the subsumption of individual development in order that the "sense of unity of civilization, of immemorial continuity of customs and ideals" might prevail, works *against* the growth of the individual, seeing it as a sacrifice necessitated by the continuation of the Chinese patterns of social existence.

The "harmonious" nature of Chinese social life then affords us with what the Chinese have to offer the West: a sense of "calm and patience, a willingness to take only the steps... which are immediately necessary"[21] which would have a "wonderfully healing effect" on the national consciousness of Western nations. Furthermore, the "Taoist"[22] philosophy of *wu-wei*[23] a sort of cultivated passivity of the present whereby one consigns one's self to the fact of one's inability to seriously affect or alter the unfolding of the course of events in the world is understood to be "a profoundly valuable contribution to human culture and one of which a hurried, impatient, over-busied and anxious West is infinitely in need."[24]

But what the Chinese have to offer the West, in exchange for the democracy and science of the West, does not seem to be so readily detachable from its Chinese origins.

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[21] John Dewey, "The Chinese Philosophy of Life," *Characters and Events*, Joseph Ratner, ed., (New York: Octagon, 1970), vol. one, p. 210.
[22] It is unclear as to what Dewey means by "Taoist" here, although I am inclined to understand it in a strict sense, referring to the tenets of the philosophical "figures" Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi.
[23] *Wu-wei* is a Daoist term which literally means "lacking effecting" and generally refers to the practice of the serenity afforded by a spiritual "doing nothing."
[24] John Dewey, "The Chinese Philosophy of Life," *Characters and Events*, Joseph Ratner, ed., (New York: Octagon, 1970), vol. one, p. 206.

For since both the cultivated fatalism of Taoism and the sense of Chinese social harmony have their origins in the social facts of Chinese existence, it would be difficult to argue that the "over-busied and anxious" West could simply "adopt" these philosophies without having had some experience of Chinese life. Indeed, since Dewey's philosophy accords "experience" an undeniably crucial role in the formation of knowledge, for Dewey to argue that the West "needs" something of Chinese calm and patience is tantamount to arguing that the West "needs" Chinese experience. Also, why would Dewey argue *for* the adoption, by the West, of a social harmony and inner calm if the price to be paid for this calm is the stifling of individual creativity for sake of the stability of the social order?

I would thus argue that although logically there *ought* to be some concept, some Chinese body of philosophy and knowledge which could be of use to the West, that possibility is foreclosed by Dewey's understanding of the difference in cultures between the West and China. China remains in the state of *becoming* like the West. Like a child, Chinese society has not yet matured into the "adult" forms of Western liberal democracies. As a result, China can only offer the West a bittersweet nostalgic moment— the recognition of the West's own "youth," transcended and irrepeatable moments of Western past. While the Chinese might have been able to maintain a stable social order until contact with the intrusive imperialist policies of the West, the West has managed to produce the adult forms of democracy and science which are, by virtue of universalist possibilities, patterns for the rest of the human world.

This, then, is the presumed "difference" between Western philosophy and Eastern philosophy which emerges from our examination of the case of Dewey: the theoretical

developments of Western philosophy have allowed it to produce conceptual structures and ideas which transcend the specificity of its mother-cultures. Although Dewey might argue for a successful "borrowing" from the philosophy of the Chinese, the fact of the ontological assumptions he makes about the integrity of the spheres of culture frustrates his desires. The assumed culturelessness of Western science and democracy as conceptual forms and methodologies is frustrated by a naive and uncritical understanding of the concept of culture and the notion of cultural difference implied by that concept. For while democracy and science are universal, Chinese ideas, on the other hand, are always already bound to their cultural origin. The philosophical project of modernity, then, consists precisely of the erasure of the specificity of cultures under the universalizing impulses of Western ideas, concealing its ethnic tracks.

Perhaps the tragic failure of the notions of culture and cultural difference embodied here can be seen in what is generally understood to be the ultimate failure of the democratization of Chinese society, for the hopes which had been pinned to Dewey's visit and the ideas he expounded were to go unrealized, as the Chinese revolution of 1949 took Chinese society down the Marxist path prepared by Mao and the members of the Chinese Communist Party. Dewey's supporters were silenced, and Dewey himself was branded a reactionary by later Chinese thinkers, who felt that Dewey's belief in the subsumption of class categories by the proper functioning of democracy was merely another manifestation of the inherent "errors" of idealistic philosophies.[25] The Chinese adoption of Marxism, a philosophy of which Dewey was strongly critical, although he

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[25] Barry Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment in China: Educational Reform and Political Power in the Early Republic*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 4.

agreed with a great number of its insights, must surely have been saddening to Dewey, who must have thought that with this political change, the prospects of the emergence of a truly democratic Chinese society had gone unfulfilled.

But what of Western science? It might be palatable that democracy is simply a Western notion which cannot be successfully transplanted without the danger of rejection by the social host body, but surely the techniques and practices, as well as the knowledge gained by science, are able to transcend the specificity of culture. After all, since science generates knowledge about the material world, does it not produce truth? The divergence of a magnetic field will be equal to zero whether one is Chinese or American, whether the laboratory is in Beijing or Boston, will it not? Or is the account this straightforward? Let us examine an advocate of science in the Chinese space—Bertrand Russell— to see whether his accounts of the Chinese difference and the promises which limited Westernization of Chinese culture offers contributes to a resolution of this issue.

5.4 The "Delicate Enjoyment" of the Chinese

> But those who value wisdom or beauty, or even the simple enjoyment of life, will find more of these things in China than in the distracted and turbulent West, and will be happy to live where such things are valued. I wish I could hope that China, in return for our scientific knowledge, may give us something of her large tolerance and contemplative peace of mind.
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> —Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China*

Written shortly after Russell's return from a year of lecturing in China, during which he had almost died from a bad case of double pneumonia,[26] these words evoke a sense of the

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[26] For a succinct account of Russell's trip to China, see Caroline Moorehead, *Bertrand Russell: A Life*, (New York: Viking, 1993), pp. 321-333.

power Chinese culture possessed, for him, as a fetishized curative to the social ills of Western society. Indeed, the opening chapter of the book paints an interesting psychological portrait of Russell's state of mind as he journeyed from the politically disappointing war-torn Russia into the "alien culture" of China and its "life of enjoyment." Traveling along the Volga, Russell encountered a group of nomadic Russian peasants, an encounter he relays in the opening chapter of *The Problem of China*: "The flickering flames lighted up gnarled, bearded faces of wild men, strong, patient, primitive women, and children as sedate and slow as their parents. Human beings they undoubtedly were, and yet it would have been far easier for me to grow intimate with a dog or a cat or a horse than with one of them."[27] It is this meeting with the "inexpressive, inactive from despair" nomads which leads Russell to then question the role of the social theorist— he begins to suspect that Bolshevism and its "gospel of industrialism and forced labour" (which he had previously endorsed) is radically dissociated from the actual life experiences of the people in the name of whom it is practiced. Disillusioned, Russell imagines that politics is simply a "grinning devil," hell-bent on torturing the populace and the extraction of personal profit. In this manner, the chapter concludes with the statement that "It was in this mood that I set out for China to seek out a new hope."[28]

The textual stage is already set, then, for Russell's discovery of a marvelous culture, alien and isolated from the West, wherein the Chinese, by refusing to pursue the "Western" goals of "progress and efficiency" have created in the place of the technological developments of Western cultures, a culture in which *enjoyment* is central, prioritized over ideals such as "progress and efficiency." He writes: "By valuing progress and efficiency, we [in the West]

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[27] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922), pp. 18-19.
[28] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China,* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922), p. 20.

have secured power and wealth; by ignoring them, the Chinese, until we brought disturbance, secured on the whole a peaceable existence and a life full of enjoyment."[29] The Chinese way of life is thus markedly different from that which characterizes Western nations. Lacking science and the ruthless drive toward conquest and development which (necessarily?) accompanies scientific progress, the Chinese had preserved, until forcible opening by Western powers, an ancient civilization of "perfect candour and courtesy," wherein the "typical Chinaman," unlike the "typical Westerner [who] wishes to be the cause of as many changes as possible in his environment," desires instead to "enjoy as much and as delicately as possible." It is this cultural difference, Russell believes, which "is at the bottom of most of the contrast between China and the English-speaking world."[30] One wonders whether this contrast would exist between the Chinese and the French. What becomes of the West-East division in this instance?

The difference between the cultural spaces of the West and China is thus established along the lines of enjoyment, wherein, in a paradoxical reversal of the recent American obsession with the Japanese inability to "enjoy themselves," the West is portrayed as industrious to a fault, preventing Westerners from fully enjoying the lives made possible by progress and technological innovation. The Chinese possess, contrary to Western industriousness, a cultural character such that "they are capable of wild excitement, often of a collective kind,"[31] and are "...of all classes, more laughter-loving than any other race with which I am acquainted; they find amusement in everything, and a dispute can always be

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[29] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China,* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922), p. 13.
[30] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China,* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922), p. 202.
[31] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China,* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922), p. 212.

softened with a joke."[32] The cultural contact between the West and China promises to infuse Western culture with some of this Chinese ethics of enjoyment. As Russell notes, one of the questions which Westerners who have lived in China inevitably face is one which threatens the tedious stability of the Western obsession with progress, competition and the unknowable future: "Is it prudent to lose all enjoyment of the present through thinking of the disasters that may come at a future date? Should our lives be passed in building a mansion that we shall never have the leisure to inhabit?"[33] The infusion of Chinese cultural values, and hence, Chinese enjoyment, is thus the *antidote* to the cultural defects of the West, its failure to enjoy and the subsequent lack of meaningfulness in such an existence.

What we have here is, of course, a paradigmatic case of orientalism— the conceptualization of the West as the active "disturbance" in the stable, timeless culture of China locked within its own, "frozen" time, the delineation of the essence of Chineseness by someone who approaches Chinese culture as the representative of the powerful British empire, but who seems blissfully ignorant of this role.[34] As a purely anthropological and philosophical observer, Russell's insights are true, we would presume, because he is objectively positioned with respect to Chinese culture. But the consequences here reach farther than just the straightforward indictment of Russell as ensnared in the power

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[32] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China,* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922), p. 200.
[33] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China,* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922), p. 200.
[34] This fact is significant, even though one might wish to argue that since Russell was generally critical of the political policies of the British state and went so far as to proclaim himself a Communist, that he is less implicated in the power relationships indicated by his position as representative of that British state. The significance lies in the fact that Russell speaks *for* the West, and more precisely, speaks as a representative of what he understands as Western desire. In *The Problem of China*, then, Russell is always already a cultural *representative*.

relationships of orientalism. For since Russell understands his position as articulator of the Chinese character as someone who is present within the culture *as an outsider*, he speaks from a presumed position of exteriority because he understands himself to be someone who does not belong to Chinese culture— an observer in a strange land. This presumed position of cultural exteriority thus leads him to an examination of Chinese thought and society as though it were something with which he were not engaged, *despite* the fact that while Russell was in China, a "Russell society" devoted to the study of his philosophy was formed and there was even the publication of a *Russell Monthly.*[35]

What is thus significant about Russell's presumption of a position of cultural exteriority is the fact that it belies the very real interfusion of cultures which accompanies the avowal of an absolute cultural difference. In other words, although Russell (and others) might pretend that what they have to say about China are simply the descriptions of an alien culture distinct from their home culture, these pronouncements actually work to reinforce and *create* those distinctions. This is not to say that the Chinese language is the same as the English language but, rather, to suggest the possibility that the presumably *a priori* existence of "cultural difference" is instead maintained even in the face of its collapse into impossibility. As ideas "travel" across cultures which are understood to possess their own internal principles of coherence, regulating the social organization of these cultures, the increasingly visible and obvious permeability of the membrane of cultural difference must be reinforced by the introduction of distinctive essential differences between "us" and "them." We have already noted that, for Russell, the Chinese difference is conceived along the axis of

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[35] Caroline Moorehead, *Bertrand Russell: A Life*, (New York: Viking, 1993), pp. 325-326.

enjoyment. There is, however, another crucial difference for Russell between the cultures of the West and that of China. This is the development, in the West, of *science*.

5.5 What the Chinese Need

What immediately strikes an attentive reader of Bertrand Russell's *The Problem of China* is the fact that Russell persistently locates China and the Chinese within a cultural sphere which is geographically and socioculturally distinct from that of the West clearly demarcated not by stagnation due to a Confucian-mandated herd-instinct (as we find in Nietzsche), but by the lack of science and the scientific method. He writes:

> It is science that makes the difference between our [Western] intellectual outlook and that of the Chinese intelligentsia.... What we have to teach the Chinese is not morals, or ethical maxims about government, but science and technical skill. The real problem for the Chinese intellectuals is to acquire Western knowledge without acquiring the mechanistic outlook.[36]

and later in the text: "The distinctive merits of our civilization, I should say, is the scientific method; the distinctive merit of the Chinese is a just conception of the ends of life. It is these two that one must hope to see gradually uniting."[37] This is hardly an unusual assessment of "pre-Modern" China; one easily finds echoes of it in the sentiments of the modernization movements beginning in the 1920s up until the present time, from the writings of Lu Xun to the thought of Fang Lizhi, for whom the universal nature of scientific laws and the universal adoption of democracy is what constitutes "modernity."[38]

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[36] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China,* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922), p. 81.
[37] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China,* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922), p. 194.
[38] See, for example, the essay, "Chinese Democracy: The View from the Beijing Observatory," as well as "A Note on the Interface Between Science and Religion," where Fang argues, not that the Chinese did not possess science, but that Chinese science lacked, from its inception, the "proper" notion of universality, *Bringing Down the Great Wall: Writings on Science, Culture, and Democracy in China*, (New York: Norton, 1990).

But what *is* unusual about Russell's conception of China as lacking "science" is the fact that what Russell consequently advocates is the Chinese adoption of Western methods of science such that the Chinese *remain Chinese*. Science, Russell believes, is simply another "foreign influence" which cannot alter the fundamental Chineseness of the Chinese:

> There have been foreign influences— first Buddhism, and now Western science. But Buddhism did not turn the Chinese into Indians, and Western science will not turn them into Europeans.... What is bad in the West— its brutality, its restlessness, its readiness to oppress the weak, its preoccupation with purely material aims— they [the Chinese] see to be bad, and do not wish to adopt. What is good, especially its science, they do wish to adopt.[39]

What is interesting in this observation is the failure to recognize the fact that one of the reasons which the Chinese wish to adopt science is that this "science" had impressed itself upon Chinese society in the form of cannon fire upon Chinese port cities. Far from being simply a disinterested desire for the "good" of Western science, the Chinese understand all too well the possibilities of this Western knowledge-practice. But can this desire for the power of science be dissociated from its potential for misuse? What Russell desires most from the meeting of East and West is that the Chinese "imperturbable quiet dignity, which is usually not destroyed even by a European education" be coupled to the progress represented by the methodology and discoveries of Western science so as to "produce a genuinely new civilization, better than any that we in the West have been able to create."[40] Thus, if science is to be imported, Russell seems to believe that the Chinese will be able to resist its misuse and will instead direct it toward the enhancement of the "delicate enjoyment" of the Chinese populace.

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[39] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China,* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922), p. 208.
[40] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China,* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922), pp. 202, 208.

The problem here is that, although Russell *desires* the Chinese adoption of Western science without the accompanying "Western" bloodlust and imperialist aggressiveness, which has unfortunately been the companion of Western science, the cultural formations which gave rise to the development of Western science cannot be simply excised from its practice (in the West) in order to produce "pure" scientific methodology.[41] In other words, it is perhaps the case, contrary to Russell's faith, that the practice of science is as peculiarly a culturally-bound artifact as is say, the musical form of the concerto.[42] Although Russell sees science as having developed in the West, he believes it can be detached, as a culturally-neutral form of knowledge and knowledge-practice, from the socio-cultural politics of the West. It is interesting to think for a moment about the strange *logic* of this desire. How much does it depend upon a particular conceptualization of the relationship between the cultures of East and West? The cultural unidirectionality of this desire can be revealed by simply *reversing* its flow. Consider, for example, a homologous desire, reversed in cultural direction, which might be something like this: although Confucianism is accompanied in Chinese culture by stagnation and the erasure of individualism, I nonetheless desire that the West should adopt

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[41] This ought not to be taken as though I am making an argument for differences in *cultures*. I am simply trying to draw out the implications of Russell's advice, given his assumptions with regard to the cultural differences between the West and China.

[42] Actually Russell, in "The Origins of Philosophy," in *The Wisdom of the West*, Paul Foulkes, ed., (London: Macdonald, 1959), identifies both science and philosophy as *precisely* the results of the unique convergence of social and cultural factors in the culture of ancient Greece. The universalist conception he has here might be simply "youthful optimism." He writes in "Philosophy begins when someone asks a general question, and so does science. The first people to evince this kind of curiosity were the Greeks. Philosophy and science, as we now know them, are Greek inventions. The rise of Greek civilization which produced this outburst of intellectual activity is one of the most spectacular events in history. Nothing like it has ever occurred before or since," p. 10. The suggestion here, that philosophy and science were born out of the asking of a general question, and that the Greeks were the only ones in history to have done this is, of course, laughable.

Confucianism, since Confucianism is the source of profound ethical principles which would be of great benefit. Further, the West can adopt Confucianism without adopting any of its negative consequences, since Confucianism, as a system of universalizable ethical principles, is separable from the culture out of which it emerged.

Now, if it is ridiculous to conceive of Confucianism as free from its cultural origins,[43] is it any less ridiculous to think of Western science, the distinguishing characteristic of the West, as being free from *its* cultural moorings? It is perhaps difficult to conceive of the knowledge-claims of science as somehow bound to the specificity of particular "cultures," but I believe that this is an implicit consequence of Foucault's work and underlies contemporary work in the sociology of scientific knowledge.[44] There exist assumptions about the world in the claim that the divergence of the magnetic field is equal to zero which cannot be erased by appeals to facticity. In fact, one of the differences often presumed to delineate the difference between Western and Chinese cultures are the attitudes and assumptions made about the makeup and nature of the external world.[45] Russell's seeming belief in the culturelessness of

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[43] This absurdity can be observed by simply examining the great lengths to which Confucian moral philosophy is demonstrated to be a product of a particular, Chinese convergence of historical exigency.

[44] Although Foucault does not himself notice this consequence, I understand his work on the organization of knowledge and the formation of discourses to lead precisely in this direction. For if it is the accidents and contingencies in the history of knowledge production which lead to the emergence of what appear to be transcendent realms of "pure" knowledge, then the specificity of the culture in which this discursive function operates is crucial. As for the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge, Latour and Woolgar's *Laboratory Life: The Construction of Scientific Facts*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), exemplifies an attempt to reconceptualize the idea of scientific "fact." Latour and Woolgar's point is not, as commonly assumed, the ultimate relativism of knowledge claims, but rather to suggest that the rather cavalier fashion in which we accord "truth" to the claims of science needs serious reconsideration.

[45] This can be seen in the Ellen Chen's introduction to her translation of the *Tao Te Ching*, (New York: Paragon, 1989), where she draws a distinction between the destructive attitude

scientific practice then, is certainly suspect, and reveals precisely what he pretends to disavow: his own cultural embeddedness.

Where does this leave philosophy, then? Without the "revitalizing" influence of the West and its Science, China and the Chinese are understood to be *stagnant*. The "problem of China," then, is that its traditional civilization and hence, philosophy, had become, according to Russell, "unprogressive, and had ceased to produce much of value in the way of art and literature.... The influx of Western knowledge provides just the stimulus that was needed."[46] What China needs, then, is an infusion of the West, a shot in the arm to bolster the Chinese cultural immune system. To do justice to Russell, however, the question of cultural contact with China does not revolve solely upon the provision of Western scientific knowledge to China. As we have already seen, what China can provide for the West is a more "ethical" outlook on sociality, since "the distinctive merit of the Chinese is a just conception of the ends of life," and "the natural outlook of the Chinese is very pacifistic."[47] Although Russell often speaks as though it were "too late" for the West, in a manner which suggests that the West is too fond of its aggressive practices of domination made possible through science, it is not too late for China, which is not yet modern, and which should set before itself the aim of "the preservation of the urbanity and courtesy, the candour and pacific temper, which are characteristic of the Chinese nation, together with a knowledge of Western science and an application of it to the practical problems of China."[48]

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of Western science toward the natural world, as opposed to the Chinese vision of harmony *with* the natural world. See especially pp. 31-43.

[46] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China,* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922), p. 193.

[47] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China,* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922), pp. 194-195.

[48] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China,* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922), p. 250. This "primitiveness" is also part and parcel of the orientalist machine, as astutely noted by Rey

Does Russell's conceptualization of China permit this possibility, however? Is not the "urbanity and courtesy, the candour and pacific temper" of the Chinese precisely the effect of Confucianism? After all, Russell believes that Confucius' system of ethics "has succeeded in producing a whole nation possessed of exquisite manners and perfect courtesy."[49] But if it is Confucianism which effects the stagnation of China, if "Confucius does not satisfy the needs of a modern man, even if he is Chinese,"[50] then is not Russell's dream *impossible?* What it demonstrates then, is not so much the fact of the cultural differences which demarcate the West from China, but the contours of a certain form of Western desire, whereby China functions as the space of the fantasy of self-fulfillment. Since, after all, they *want* science, the Western practice of science is valorized, and theoretically separated from the real practices of conquest and war which accompanied it in the Western setting.

In addition, what would seem to be the outcome of the encounter between East and West, at least from Russell's point of view, is not the preservation of cultures but rather the radical loss of the integrity of Eastern and Western cultures, a sort of homogenization, the possibility of which he has already precluded in his description of the Chinese as "unchanging." The adaptation of both cultures, accomplished by each taking from the other what it is needed to fill a certain lack, accomplishes the work of pushing human society toward a uniform level. The West needs the enjoyment of the Chinese; the Chinese need to be brought into the twentieth century with the structures of Western science. The transcendence of the structural flaws of both Eastern and Western cultures is to be

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Chow in her insightful book, *Primitive Passions*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

[49] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China,* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922), p. 190.

[50] Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China,* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922), p. 208.

accomplished by the appropriation of what is lacking from the other. But if this is case, one could argue that Western philosophy must be necessarily incomplete as well, requiring supplementation from the philosophies of the East, an infusion of Confucianism, Taoism, and so forth. In this sense, as a supplement to the West, Confucianism represents a kind of philosophical progress. But at the same time, Confucianism is understood as a force of stagnation, an outdated philosophy of ancient China which *prevented* the rise of science and modern progress. We seem to be faced, then, with a serious contradiction, which completely undermines the validity and value of any "insights" which Russell might have had into the "problem of China." What China needs is science, prevented from emergence due to the cultural force of Confucianism, which has produced the ethical stance of the Chinese, which is precisely what is needed by the West which, fortuitously, *does* have science.

Science, then, as a cultural import, is as problematic as democracy. The assumptions made as to the cultural detachedness of scientific practice, as well as the assumptions made with regard to the integrity of the cultural spaces themselves indicate that, far from being a simple question of human advancement, the prescription of cultural deficiencies points at a mode of self-understanding which fails to attain a level of critical evaluation. The suggestion here, then, is that the mere recognition of other cultures is itself part of the problem of multiculturalism. It is not so much that all cultures need to be respected for what they are, but a question of why we would ever think it necessary to divide the world in terms of culture. I am not arguing that this problem is simply one of false perceptions which require the light of truth to dispel it. There is more to the matter than this, and as we examine the case of Simone de Beauvoir, we will address the question of desire and the cultural other in more detail.

5.6 The Chinese Orientation

> The sky has cleared during the day; it is a cool but bright evening as at seven thirty we climb the stairway leading to the Tien An Men terrace: a hundred delegates have been invited to come and watch the fireworks from there. We go over to the balustrade. There are four hundred thousand people gathered on the square and on the avenue: "Caviar," says Sartre, peering at all those dark heads pressed close together.
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> —Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*

Simone de Beauvoir and Sartre journeyed together to China for the months of September and October, 1955. Sartre's culinary metaphor above, for the experience of seeing an immense Chinese crowd massed for the celebration of the birth of the People's Republic of China, is Beauvoir's only mention of his presence in China in her "book on China," *The Long March*, written in 1957. Putting aside the rather troubling implications of this metaphor for the uniformity of the Chinese crowd, Sartre's reduction of the Chinese crowd anecdotally locates the focal point of a certain, contradictory strain which runs throughout the body of Beauvoir's 500-page work. To put this tension simply, and in a preliminary form, let us say that her text is continually engaged with the dialectical relationship of the affirmation of individuality in the face of a seemingly homogeneous human mass and the loss of that individuality before the dead weight of a long and heavy tradition. Beauvoir's resolution of this individual/social dialectic is, ultimately, to identify the Chinese Liberation of 1949 as the flashpoint in which Chinese individuality manages to finally assert itself after endless centuries of Confucian suppression. The new Chinese state marks a break in the Chinese dialectic and signals the overdue assertion of a properly *Chinese* identity brought on by the fact that, at long last, the Chinese have been forced to confront an "other";

the West will not allow itself to be absorbed or ignored like the perennial "barbarians" who have periodically appeared in the pages of Chinese history.[51]

Despite the Marxist orientation of this flashpoint in Chinese history, the position which Beauvoir takes here is not an unusual one to take in an analysis of Chinese subjects: we have already been presented with various conceptualizations of the homogeneity of the Chinese, and seen the normative assessment of Chinese tradition as based upon a Confucian-induced stagnation which guarantees that homogeneity, whether it is based primarily upon the cultural (as, say, in Dewey and Russell) or upon the material (Marx). What *is* subsequently different about Beauvoir's contradictory descriptions of the state of the new nation and its "culture" is the fact that they reveal, perhaps more clearly than before, a sociopolitical *fetishization* of the Chinese other. In other words, what I will attempt to argue here is that Beauvoir's understanding of Chinese thought and culture, as well as its material structures and bases, has more to say about Beauvoir and her understanding of the world than it does about China. Further, since Chinese society has been fetishized as the glimmerings of the material and social fulfillment of the promises of Marxism, her reading of Chinese society and culture provides us with an instantiation of the desire of the West, a desire which functions to give the West and Western culture its meaning. Thus, what I will be dealing with in this section is not *fact*— I do not wish to quibble with the numbers, statistics, names and dates

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[51] She writes, for example, that "The Chinese had the keenest contempt for all barbarians— for that is to say, whoever was not Chinese— this contempt which restricted the world to the Empire alone did away with the necessity for the empire to assert that it was superior. For lack of a relationship with something other than itself, it never took a stand, never achieved the identity that is wrought of choice alone." *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 252.

which she rattles off in summary fashion with little of the usual scholarly apparatus.[52] Instead, what I hope to show is that these inconsistencies and errors of fact point to the fact that China is cathected for Beauvoir as a Western *objet petit a*, an unattainable object of Western desire.[53] Thus, China becomes a strange place where "...there are no social cleavages; the community of interests, the economic solidarity of all individuals make the collectivity into a homogeneous and concrete reality...."[54] In Beauvoir's imagination, China has made real the ultimate democratic dream: the existence of a real (communist) community and solidarity, *without* the totalitarian erasure of the individual necessitated by the demands of that collectivity. China thus conceived is the answer to one of the central philosophical problematics of existentialism: how to relate and preserve the individual in the face of its radical erasure by that which threatens to engulf and overwhelm it.

What is of course, the focus of this chapter and its guiding vector of analysis, is the position of the culture and philosophy of the Chinese. But although the philosophical orientation of the author might have changed, the trajectory of this epistemological object

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[52] If so desired, these "inaccuracies" can be noted by taking into account Rene Etiemble's scathing essay "Simone de Beauvoir, the Concrete Mandarin," translated into English by Germaine Bree in *Critical Essays on Simone de Beauvoir*, Elaine Marks, ed., (Boston: Hall, 1987), pp. 58-76. Although it might be, in certain instances, strategically useful to undermine the traditions of citation and so forth, I feel that the lack of such in Beauvoir's text results in the assertion of a kind of ethnographic authority which belies any claims to "objective description." Since there is no justification or attributions of "facts," Beauvoir is free to invent the Chineseness needed for her arguments.

[53] This *objet petit a* is the Lacanian formulation of the strange object which serves to direct our desires— it stands in for what we desire— but as soon as it is attained, ceases to become what we desire. What makes it a strange object is that although it can seemingly be identified as the object of desire, it is not *really* the object of desire, for once we have it, it ceases to fulfill that function.

[54] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 491.

called Chinese philosophy remains unaltered, for despite the radical divergence between the views of Dewey, Russell, and Beauvoir, what appears is once again the stale, stagnant Chinese Confucianist, headed for that necessary and ineluctable confrontation with the dynamic manifestations of Western thought. This time, however, the figure of Chinese philosophy, representing the inertia-dampening strictures of Confucian society mandated by the will-to-remain-in-power of the aristocratic elite, is counterposed against its dialectical opposite in the figure of Mao. For it is Mao Zedong and his successful application of Marxist-Leninist theories to the concrete historical position of Chinese culture which permits the development of a vitalized universalizing principle within the "culture" of the new People's Republic. This regime, for which Beauvoir is a strident apologist, has raised from the ashes of the devastated Imperial China the material possibility of a real socialist future, in which "nothing is contingent," where even the newly planted trees derive their meaning from the (glorious?) future they portend.[55] The "stalled" dialectic which once functioned to maintain the structures of Chinese society immutable has roared into life by a timely transfusion of the volatile ideas of Marx.

Under this sort of hermeneutical framework, "Western" philosophy is always already "progressive" and its inherent dynamism is reaffirmed in the power of Marxist theory. The social success of Marxist theory in China simply underscores the underlying commitment of Western philosophy to the progressive and democratic development of human societies and their organization. Injected into the Chinese social body, it has brought new life to the

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[55] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 32.

society, irrevocably "shattering" long-dead institutions and jump-starting the machinery of Chinese society:

> the ancient structures have not been repainted, they have been irrevocably shattered; hitherto it was always a sterile impetus that was given to the wheel revolving around a stationary hub; today, the entire machine is in motion, and China is going forward. She has ceased living from day to day, from hand to mouth, dreaming of a mythical Golden Age; she is oriented toward the future and is driving toward.[56]

All of the material facts of Chinese society attest to this impetus, whether it is the universalization of the spoken language and the debates to abolish the traditional writing system in favor of an alphabetic orthography, the drive toward freedom of marriage and the official encouragement of romantic love as its basis, or the innumerable transformations in the management of nature. With the introduction of Western ideas have come societal changes on a scale and intensity unimaginable under the auspices of stuffy Confucian orthodoxy.

At the risk of redundancy, but in the desire to remain clear, the question is *not* whether or not the emergence of a Chinese nation-state predicated upon the tenets of Marxism-Leninism has or has not been beneficial to the citizens of that state. Rather, the point is to explore the ways in which the emergence of this state possesses an ethnic character or, better, the ways in which the theoretical attempts to comprehend certain "Chinese" historical events are themselves indelibly marked by an ethnicity blind to itself, able only to recognize the homogeneous ethnicity of the other. Describing the social body of post-Liberation China, benefiting from its shiny pink graft of Western philosophical skin, as some sort of "historical progress" ignores the fact that there is no transcendental, objective point at

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[56] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 483.

which one can view human history. In fact, part of the argument that the utilization of grand narratives in philosophy is outmoded lies in what is covered over by the acceptance of this theoretical stance. For Beauvoir's case, understanding the transformation of the principle of Chinese society from Confucian to Marxist fails to acknowledge the presence of the ethnicity of the speaker, universalizing the position of the Western subject, even as it attains to the objective contemplation of the alterior culture of the Chinese.

5.7 culture/Culture

The first distinction which needs to be made in an analysis of Beauvoir's text is between *culture* and *Culture*. Beauvoir uses the word "culture" in at least two distinguishable senses throughout the text of *The Long March*.[57] The first sense (*culture*) is the general sense of "culture" as that body of social knowledge which encompasses the way of life of a people, their institutions, rituals, ways of eating, and so on. This sense, *culture*, might be exemplified by statements such as:

> ...all of China is firmly united in this: everything that can possibly be eaten, is eaten.[58]

and

> The Chinese have had the habit of expectorating for thousands of years and they find spitting in public perfectly normal, even during a rather ceremonious occasion— quite as normal as we find blowing our nose.[59]

or

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[57] One might, of course, argue for more, but I think that the two senses I track here are sufficient for the purpose here, which is namely to bring into relief certain assumptions about cultural homogeneity and the non-permeability of cultural spaces.
[58] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 80.
[59] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 431.

> The Chinese, however, escapes this conformism: he does not care a fig whether he is or is not the same as the others; his behavior is natural, hence as varied as life itself is various.[60]

These anecdotes rely upon some notion of Chinese culture as praxis, as a peculiarly Chinese mode of life the details of which can be observed and reported.

On the other hand, *Culture* is to be distinguished from *culture* in that *Culture* refers to something like "high culture" as opposed to "popular culture" or, put in Beauvoir's Marxist lexicon: "revolutionary culture" as opposed to "bourgeois culture." Thus, her analysis of Confucianism produces statements like: "The Confucian functionaries made culture a class privilege."[61] and, in considering the movement to write in vernacular Chinese (*baihua*) as opposed to the traditional Classical Chinese (*guwen*), injunctions like "A higher culture must be made available to everyone."[62] Obviously the exclusion of the peasants from "culture" cannot mean that these peasants are excluded from the way of life which characterizes all Chinese. What she means here is, of course, that the peasants are prevented from being active participants in the production of "high culture" or *Culture*.

It is thus precisely the beneficial consequences of a semantic and ontological fusion of *culture* and *Culture* which, Beauvoir thinks, the new communist regime offers to the Chinese. Since *Culture* under the old Confucian order had become frozen and its refinements "ill conceal[ed] the monotony of a civilization mired down in immanence," and indeed "ceased to

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[60] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 498.
[61] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 235.
[62] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 249.

budge ages ago,"[63] what is necessary is that *Culture* be consciously constructed from *culture*. thus creating a truly universal "culture of the Chinese people" which at one and the same time is both universally accessible to anyone who is "Chinese" and manages to preserve at least some part of the "higher" artistic value typically ascribed to *Culture*. Once this simultaneously national and popular *culture* has been attained, the next step in this cultural dialectics is its globalization:

> The day— it will come— when they are the equal of the world's most advanced nations, there will not be any more drawing distinctions between China and the West: everyone shall share in a universal culture. This assumes its particular figure in each particular country: no question but that China shall put her impress upon it; but her originality lies ahead of her, not behind; she shall forge it out of a living future. She is not to be defined or checked by a dead past.[64]

The true promise offered up by the establishment of a communist Chinese state then, is that of the ultimate democratization of social life. No longer will the bohemian cafes of Paris be the sole guardians of high culture while the working class Algerian poor subsists in its hovels, reading, watching and enjoying the culture of ideological mystification permitted it by the bourgeois powers that be. The enjoyment of Puccini will no longer serve to mark classes from each other and the peoples of each society will enjoy their own peculiar "national" manifestation of the one global, proletarian culture. This is the dream offered up by Beauvoir's consideration of the revolution in Chinese *C/cultural* politics.

In discussing the transition from a politics of *Culture* to a politics of *culture* however, Beauvoir's analysis of the situation in post-Liberation China poses more than a few

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[63] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), pp. 478-479.
[64] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 363.

difficulties. Barring the dismantling of the Confucian social strictures which made the possession of *Culture* the privilege of the aristocratic and powerful, the next major obstacle to be overcome is educational. Here, she admires the steps the regime is taking toward universal literacy: the young are teaching the old to read, and by encouraging the development of a people's *culture*, the regime is hoping to nurture the outgrowth of a *C/culture* which would truly express the pulse of the newly developing society.[65] But since this new society cannot be simply produced from nothingness, there must be discernible links between the culture of traditional China and the culture of the new communist regime. Thus, one of the cultural efforts of the Ministry of Culture has been the simplification of the literary classics, in order that the newly educated masses might have access to them. Beauvoir agrees with this strategy of *Cultural* simplification:

> Many readers totally lack in background, and these great books of the past are difficult and disconcerting if one comes to them unprovided with a key; it is absolutely necessary to place them and explain them. At a time when millions of men are only beginning to obtain an education, an excess of subtlety would be harmful: explanations must be simple and unequivocal. They can be contested later by minds that have acquired a culture founded upon the solid bases being laid down today.[66]

In addition to a simplification of meaning and the suppression of textual "subtleties," there is also the indispensability of screening the content of *Culture* for signs of social "disease":

> The Chinese who is just now opening his eyes to culture, for whom the mere deciphering of a text is still something akin to performing a miracle, takes every written word as gospel truth: he is as incapable of ferreting out error as

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[65] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 310.
[66] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 310.

> he is of spotting the cholera microbe in apparently clear water; it is for the regime to see that he is given a wholesome diet.[67]

Kept in the dark for so long by the *Cultural* elite, the "common man" thus battles both illiteracy and the "lack of political background or sophistication"[68] in the quest for *cultural* authentication. The ignorant one *needs* the guidance of those who are able to discern the *cultural* truth behind what appear to him/her as beguiling golden words.

The problem here is that Beauvoir assumes that this epistemological differential between those who "lack sophistication" and those who are capable of "explaining clearly without equivocation" simply withers away after the ignorant one has been raised to the appropriate level of *Cultural* consciousness. Once this level of *Cultural* proficiency has been attained, the ignorant one will be able to "ferret out" error: s/he will have learned the proper difference between truth and falsity. The fusion of *Culture* with *culture* consists of a sort of "consciousness-raising": once the masses understand the proper distinction between that which is true (read: infused with the correct revolutionary consciousness) and that which is false (read: infected with reactionary bourgeois tendencies), the stage will have been set for a true equality on the plane of ideas.

Obviously, Beauvoir did not have access to knowledge of the future and the disastrous consequences of the assumption that society can be divided into the spheres of those who know and those who do not; she could not have foreseen the events of the Cultural Revolution, wherein precisely this power differential was utilized in socially

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[67] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 315.
[68] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 247n.

devastating political battles. But the problem is deeper here and points toward a discussion of the implicit *homogeneity* which functions beneath the surface of culture-discourse. How is that which is proper to the "essence" of Chinese discerned by those who know? What does the attempt to produce a "truly Chinese" culture entail? Can this assumption, that there are Chinese who are at the same time, not Chinese, yield any significant theoretical insights? Does the production of a truly Chinese *culture* necessitate the assumption that that *culture* must be homogeneous, albeit in a "revolutionary fashion? Do the members of a *culture* ever in fact consider themselves to be part of a *homogeneous* group? Does not this presumption of *cultural* homogeneity mitigate against the emergence of unique individualities, precisely the task of Beauvoir's existentialist project?

5.8 Homo(hetero)geneity

At the risk of lapsing into the superficial wordplay of bad postmodernist writing, I wish to risk a definition, in order to facilitate the process of unraveling Beauvoir's text. *"Homo(hetero)geneity"* refers to that utopian societal vision of meaningful (heterogeneous) individual existence which is somehow incorporated within a homogeneity of social interests, *without losing its heterogeneity.* The embedding of "hetero" within "homogeneity" serves to mark this existence of the unique and distinctive individual within what is presumed to be a universal social interest. An example of this type of conceptualization of the situation of the Chinese appears early on in the text, as Beauvoir describes the appearances and manner of the "Pekingese"[69]:

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[69] Beauvoir's term for the inhabitants of Peking (Beijing). Despite the fact that the word might generate some interpretive confusion in the mind of the reader, since it is also the name given a breed of dog, I have chosen to retain its usage wherever it occurs, to preserve the flavor of Beauvoir's text as translated into English.

> Men are not all the same station in China, but Peking offers a perfect image of a classless society. Impossible to tell an intellectual from a worker, a charwoman from a capitalist wife. This is in part owing to the notorious uniformity of dress.... The fact is that in Peking blue trousers and jackets seem to be as ineluctable as black hair: these two colors go so well together, blend so happily with the lights and shadows of the city that there are moments when you would think you were walking through a scene from Cezanne. But this crowd's unity stems from a deeper source: nobody is arrogant here, nobody is grabby, nobody feels himself above or below anybody else.... Here, the cleavage between social categories is not apparent: those one stands among are a multitude of individuals, infinitely unalike. Through their features, through their structure, Chinese faces are exceedingly varied; and as their expression conform to no ritual of class each of them evokes a unique self and tells a story all its own.[70]

What, exactly, is going on in this passage? The eradication of visible class distinctions (no one is wearing a Chanel dress or wearing an Armani suit) produces the impression of a seemingly nondifferentiable human crowd; no one is socially different from anyone else. The passage goes farther, though, and asserts that the nondifferentiability derives from a certain psychology as well; no one is "grabby," or "arrogant." But what is ultimately the outcome of this phenomenology is that one is forced to notice the infinite variety of individuals with which one is confronted; no one looks the same as anyone else, and each person becomes the embodiment of a unique life history made visible because of a certain homogeneity. The prima facie homogeneity of social existence is precisely that which enables the true manifestation and preservation of individual heterogeneity.

Although it might be possible to accept the uniformity of dress, everyone garbed in the same style, blue garments as either the mandate of the government intended for the eradication of the marking of class divisions by dress or a collective manifestation of

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[70] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), pp. 53-54.

individual choice, it is difficult to accept that social stations would be, as a result, completely unmarked. It is far more likely that Beauvoir is simply within a social space which is governed by rules of differentiation with which she is unfamiliar; being from the exterior of Chinese society, she is not privy to its social codes. It is similarly impossible to accept the claim that no one is "grabby" or "arrogant"; this generalization suggests that Beauvoir has access somehow to the essence of the *culture* of the Chinese, and that, instead of being the manifestation of social rule of "being polite to strangers," this politeness constitutes an essential component of Chinese psychology. Indeed, this psychological observation misses its own point of reference: as a white, European woman in the midst of a crowd of Chinese, Beauvoir could hardly have hidden who she was. Thus, this phenomenology reveals, not who the Chinese are as such, but who the Chinese are *for Beauvoir*.

When Beauvoir writes then, in reference to the Beijing crowd described above, that "Homogeneity does not signify sameness,"[71] she means to suggest that although these Chinese might *look* the same and thus give off the semblance of homogeneity, closer examination reveals individual differences which belie this homogeneity, generating an infinite divergence of individuals. But if this is the case, what is the import of maintaining that homogeneity nonetheless exists? Would it not be easier simply to consign it to the garbage and admit that only the material fact of inhabiting "Chinese territory" confers Chineseness? Does living in China transform Beauvoir from "French" to "Chinese?" Would learning to speak the language accomplish this shift in cultural identity? Would spitting on the street with

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[71] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 54.

greater frequency while beginning to eat everything that can be eaten accomplish this transformation?

On one level, it is tempting to suggest psychological reasons for Beauvoir's desire to identify what Chineseness is. We could suggest that, faced with a bewildering array of unfamiliar people and practices, and the consciousness of having traveled a great distance from "home," the identification of what constitutes the Chinese other is a necessary form of psychological defense against the cognitive shock of being immersed with what one "knows" is completely different from that with which one is familiar. The problem with this sort of explanation is that it too easily reduces the act of cultural essentialization to a cognitive reflex; we cannot *help* but think that the Chinese are somehow marked by a Chinese essence. Consequently, the only viable recourse for combating the thorny problem of essentialism lies in re-education: once properly taught to view the other as not possessed of a mysterious, alterior essence, the xenophobic consequences of our instincts can be ameliorated; science will have conquered nature once again.

This solution reproduces, as a matter of course, the irremediable split between those who know and those who are ignorant, echoing the paradoxes faced by certain brands of feminism and Marxism: why is it that, once educated as to the true nature of their position within capitalist and patriarchal society, individuals who have much to gain by challenging these social systems nonetheless *refuse to do so?* The answer to this is, of course, that this attempt at the subversion of the dominant social system fails to come to terms with the *desire* of the individuals it seeks to reform. Instead of being viewed as subjects with a vested interest in who they are and indeed, *want* to be, these theories flatten out subjectivity by

suggesting that mere exposure to the light of reason suffices to dispel the patriarchal and bourgeois clouds of mystification.

In the case of Beauvoir, what I wish to suggest is that the reason why the Chinese must possess an ethnicity is twofold. First, the existence of a unique Chineseness allows Beauvoir to imagine that China represents the meaning of Marxism; the new China makes real the promises of Marxist theory. Second, concomitant with the Marxist fantasy of China as socialist revolution incarnate, is the fact that the ability to recognize that China as such confers upon Beauvoir the identity of the *Western* intellectual. In other words, what the desire to see China succeed as socialist amounts to, for Beauvoir, is the affirmation that one is theoretically correct, *from the perspective of Western theory*. At this point, these claims clearly remain at the level of conjecture. What I wish to examine next then, is Beauvoir's conception of Chinese philosophy, both with respect to how she identifies it *as Chinese*, as well as how that identification reveals something of the logic of her "Western" desire.

5.9 The Confucian Orientation Reoriented

The infamous VII.1 passage from the Confucian *Analects* (a work composed of the sayings of Confucius and his disciples composed over a two hundred year period ending in about 249 BC[72]) seemingly summarily describes the Confucian (and hence, Chinese) attitude toward tradition: "The Master said: 'I transmit but do not innovate; I am truthful in what I say and devoted to antiquity. I venture to compare myself to our Old P'eng.'"[73] If one takes this passage at face value and subscribes to the notion that it might be possible to simply

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[72] For this dating and the research to support this version of the composition of the text of the *Analects*, see the forthcoming translation of the text by E. Bruce and Taeko Brooks by Columbia University Press.

[73] Confucius, *Analects*, D. C. Lau, trans., (New York: Penguin, 1979), p. 86.

"transmit" cultural knowledge to a new location without ever "innovating" or distorting the spirit of what is transmitted, then this passage reinforces the standard image of Confucianism as dedicated to a rigid conformity with ancient tradition, maintaining it even in the face of it increasing obsolescence. Although Beauvoir understands Confucianism to be a force of stagnation, she herself tacitly repudiates this version of Confucius, writing that although Confucius ought not to be called "revolutionary" for his ideas, "Certainly, there was something new in Confucius' doctrine; every thinker is an innovator."[74]

But on what basis then, does Beauvoir establish the antinomy between the Confucian (and Taoist) philosophical tradition and the work of the twentieth century Marxist-Leninists? Since Beauvoir is a good Marxist, this antagonism is of course located in antagonistic *class* interests. This class struggle finds its expression in the conflict between the bureaucratic elite supported by Confucian ideologues and the peasantry: "Subordinating a huge population to a handful of bureaucrats, immolating the living world to defunct ancestors, Confucian ideology undertook to annihilate the individual at the very moment when, fighting out of tradition's grip, the individual was becoming aware of himself...."[75] This Confucian control over *culture* took the form of the inaccessibility of *Culture* to the population at large. This cultural segregation, however, "favored the emergence of a folklore while the universalization of culture deprived us of one in France."[76] Advocacy of the rejection of Confucian tradition

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[74] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 280.
[75] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 269.
[76] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 258.

then, means the acceptance of a universalized popular culture for the first time in Chinese history.

In addition to Confucius, Beauvoir also rejects Taoist and Buddhist philosophies as ultimately forms of mystification, offering the people the cultivation of a stoic attitude of resignation as the only means of countering the misery of their lot. Taoism, for example, "...invited the Chinese to break loose from his mortal confines, to transcend himself by plunging into dream," while Buddhism is "...a quietism also, which abandoned the terrain to Confucianism."[77] This triumvirate of Chinese philosophy (or perhaps more properly, *Chinese ideologies*) produced philosophers who, "took the stagnation their country was sunk in for an image of eternity. Spent after their bickering over details, they would all heave the same sigh of relief: 'The Tao is everlastingly unalterable.'"[78] If left alone, this self-sustaining, closed-circuit of a society would have maintained its unchanging course for, having foreclosed the emergence of an active bourgeoisie by imperial mandate,[79] there was no internal contradiction to spur the dialectic into action. But since Chinese isolation ended abruptly after contact with the expanding colonial powers, changes in the situation of the Chinese were inevitable.

This is not to say there do not, for Beauvoir, also exist historical occurrences of resistance to the ideological dominance of the Confucian order. The materialist tendencies of Mencius, the most prominent disciple of Confucius, are noted in this regard, as well as the

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[77] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), pp. 270-271.
[78] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 271.
[79] See her argument and summary analysis of Chinese history and its relation to C/culture at *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), pp. 266-278.

attack on Confucianism by Mo Ti, founder of the Mohist school. Although Beauvoir resorts to citing Mencius in the final pages of the book to defend the communist government against the defenders of bourgeois liberties who criticize it, Beauvoir's primary understanding of his work is as a simplistic form of materialism, wherein human beings are completely determined by the material environment of their existence and "...the notion of human nature operates a little like the unknown in an equation: it helps solve the equation, but does not appear in the answer."[80] The treatment of Mohist philosophy is equally problematic in that, although it is true that Mohists saw themselves as reacting to excesses of Confucianism, it would be a mistake to say that Mohism was primarily a doctrine of the people. Beauvoir thus juxtaposes what she believes to be a philosophy of the people against a philosophy of the elite: "There are some who claim that Confucianism subordinates politics to morals; Mo Ti long ago denounced this lie. He was thoroughly aware that the privileged do not model their order after any pure idea of Good but that they call *good* the order they choose to institute."[81] Beauvoir's reading of Mohist thought is flatly repudiated by reference to the Mohist text itself. In the section entitled "Identification with the Superior," Mo Ti's basic argument is that the emperor is chosen by Heaven (Tian) to enforce standards set in accordance with the patterns of Heaven: "Knowing the cause of the confusion to be in the absence of a ruler who could unify the standards in the world, (Heaven) chose the virtuous, sagacious, and wise in the world and crowned him emperor, charging him with the duty of unifying the wills in the

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[80] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 283n.
[81] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), pp. 262-263.

empire."[82] Although it may appear as though this passage supports Beauvoir's interpretation that the populace was subject to the whim of the powerful, the passage itself suggests that there is some notion of Good (read here as "standards") which Heaven attempts to instantiate. The role of the ruler, then, is not purely that of the totalitarian ruler who may define standards as he pleases, but rather one of applying a recognized virtuousness in the preservation of social order and the maintenance of Heaven-given standards of conduct and life.

Since, according to Beauvoir, both Mohism and the materialism of Mencius were historically unable to overcome the dominance of Confucianism, the necessary impetus for social change in China had to come from the exterior. Brought into increasingly worse military conflicts with the West, the nascent Chinese bourgeoisie (which owed its existence to the burgeoning of China-West trade) "divested the [Confucian] clerks of their monopoly over culture and set about modernizing it" *because* "From its birth at the close of the nineteenth century it [the Chinese bourgeoisie] realized that, on the scientific and technical planes, China absolutely had to stand on an even footing with the West."[83] To further this goal, the Chinese bourgeoisie "sent its sons abroad," and the rapid influx of Western ideas and methods ultimately brought with it the liberatory theories of Marx.

But with the victory of Marxism in China, what becomes of the tradition which had dragged China down into the abyss of technological and scientific backwardness? One might think that there would be a certain tension between philosophies as antithetical as Marxism

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[82] Motse, *The Ethical and Political Works of Motse*, Yi-Pao Mei, trans., (Westport: Hyperion, 1929), p. 59.
[83] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), pp. 271-272.

and Confucianism, at least in the manner in which Beauvoir renders them. After all, "...these ancient doctrines are incompatible with Marxism from the simple fact that they imply a classless world and deny history."[84] But the ideological tension which exists is *not*, for Beauvoir, between Marxism and Confucianism, but rather between Marxism and "...the amalgam of pragmatism and idealism Hu Shih borrowed from Dewey."[85] The ideological conflict in Chinese society has progressed from the nonexistence of struggle against imperial Confucianism, to the struggle of the bourgeoisie against Confucianism, to the vanquishing of Confucianism and the emergence of conflict with new, sinified Western bourgeois ideology.[86] Chinese philosophy, which had never been capable of reproducing social stagnation is at last superseded, but only by means of *Western* ideas.

5.10 Cultural Integrity, Broken Promises

There is thus no seeming escape from the Western. No matter how Chinese thought or society might develop, it is always in Western terms, along the lines laid down by Western ideas. The problem here is not one of "cultural purity." The goal has not been to assert that the Chinese need to be authentically Chinese in both thought and culture. The result would only be an increasing fragmentation of the globe at the same time that technological advances of both West and East are shrinking the experience of distance. Rather, if the development of

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[84] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 281.
[85] Simone de Beauvoir, *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 281.
[86] Beauvoir writes that "Confucianism does not by any means represent the Marxist theoreticians' most redoubtable foe; they have no need to decree war against it for the excellent reason that it perished long ere this...," *The Long March*, Austryn Wainhouse, trans., (New York: World, 1958), p. 281. Given the current rehabilitation of Confucius in China, the death of Confucianism is perhaps exaggerated.

any "culture," any society in this period can be shown to be always already intertwined with the ideas and practices of what is assumed to be an other culture, ought not the task to be the maintenance of cultural purity, but rather the celebration of its impurity?

But what of the desire to be identified as the representative of some culture? We have seen that in the cases of Dewey, Russell, and Beauvoir, the delineation of the difference which establishes the separation of Western and Chinese cultures also marks a certain manifestation of this desire. This desire is perhaps best understood as being the honest desire to help what is perceived as a backward culture, *as well as* the desire to come to terms with a Western self-understanding. In the light of the violence perpetrated by the West, the desire of the subjugated to nonetheless adopt the guiding principles of the West, be it science or political theory, suggests that this violence was the unfortunate result of the acts of unscrupulous individuals. What the "West" means is thus *not* the violent subjugation of what it has determined to be the non-West, but rather, "progress," "enlightenment," and "truth." The desire to recognize China as a space wherein the story of West can be replayed, this time with a different ending, is thus not purely the desire for the uplifting of the natives; it is also the desire for self-fulfillment, a desire for Western absolution from the sins of its fathers.

A promise entails a responsibility to someone else. In the case of China, it would seem that the Chinese promise is a *Western* promise made to the future generations of all humanity, enacted in Chinese space. But to say that someone or something *holds* promise is to suggest that from the privileged vantage point of more advanced education or development, one can perceive the potential inherent in the nascent and the as-yet-undeveloped. Does that which holds promise ever attain to the level of the evaluator? In our times, where the Chinese are being established by the media and world governments as the

violators of human rights and the perpetrators of inhuman restrictions on the lives of its citizens, when it is continually held up as the epitome of anti-democratic, we would have to say that those who might have thought that the Chinese held some promise for them were mistaken, whether they pinned Marxist, or more liberal hopes to them. This is not to suggest that I am attempting to be an apologist for the Chinese government. Rather, this concerns the perennial play of power in the delineation of an "us" and a "them." In the case of the promise of civilization, be it Western or Chinese, the task is determine what obstacles remain in the path of the goal of global unity. As I have been suggesting here, part of the problem is the assumption that both the conception of culture and the desire to announce oneself as the bearer of a culture is an unproblematic desire. For what this desires works to maintain is a perpetual abyss between the worlds of "us" and "them," a distinction which has always (must it?) announced itself in the form of a hierarchical power. Thus, what remains to be done is the unraveling of the desire to make this distinction, to demonstrate its complicity in the practices of both West *and* East which serve to dominate those marked as others. The us-them dichotomy must be broken down, for if we continually pin the promises of human civilization onto the shirts of others, we may find that that hope has been misplaced, not only in "them," but also in "us."

CHAPTER 6

SEXES AND CITIZENS

6.1 The Social and the Political

Up to this point, we have been considering the function and field of cultural alterity in what might be argued to be a more theoretical context— the focus of the analysis has been upon the cultural coherence and integrity of Western philosophy as juxtaposed against what is designated as Chinese philosophy. Although the analysis has been grounded in the texts of the thinkers examined thus far, it has also remained primarily centered on the *philosophical* implications of their claims as to the foreignness of the Chinese space and the radical differences in the thought of those who inhabit that space. What concerns us now is how these theoretical considerations play themselves out in the realm of the social and of the political— arenas long disdained by certain schools of academic philosophy. Specifically, this chapter will attempt the beginnings of an examination of how the difference between the cultures of China and the West translates into a systematic practice of self (and other) understanding such that any meaningful differences in social and political structures are always perceived as being grounded along the divide of the cultural. In this manner, I hope to demonstrate that a process similar to the one which underpins the desire to differentiate between the Western and the non-Western on the plane of the philosophical exists as well in the ways in which the other is gendered and in the manner in which the political space of the other is understood. The end result will be, hopefully, to point out directions in which the line of thought taken here can be made relevant and not remain solely within the sanitized environment of the theoretical.

This chapter will thus be composed of two primary parts, held together by the infamous events in Tiananmen Square in May and June of 1989, when the Chinese government committed acts of violence against "its own people," people who had built a symbolic liberty statue and who claimed only to be seeking the advancement of democracy within China. For it is this "democracy protest," with its iconic "Goddess of Liberty" which seemingly conjoins the identity of Chinese women and the meaning of democracy when imported into "foreign space." Both are primary examples of the Chinese difference articulated in the field of gender and politics. The Chinese other has always been (and will doubtless always be) marked by the insistence that its political forms are unique to its social space and that its people are motivated by a different understanding of the bodies they inhabit. Whether this insistence takes the form of the assertion that with its practices of *taiqi* and other bodily forms of meditation, the Chinese possess a means of becoming more properly attuned to the rhythms and energies contained within the human body, or the vacuous observation that the Chinese are "not used to democracy"[1] because they have lived with the collective experience of centuries of dynastic rule, the point has been to reinforce the notion that there is an unbridgeable gap between our cultural experience and theirs. Furthermore, the myth of the demure and mysterious "Asian woman" is also firmly rooted in the difference in character between the spaces of the West and China— cultivated as the result of centuries of Confucian confinement to the home, forbidden to engage in the public sphere, the provenance of men, how could Chinese women be otherwise?

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[1] An actual comment, overheard on a long plane flight, accompanied by an extensive explanation of the fundamentally Confucian nature of Chinese culture.

But do these explanations work? Or do they simply shift the burden of accounting for difference to the untouchable field of a culture vastly different from "our own?" In the case of Western philosophy, I have argued that part of the reason for claiming that the other's difference was grounded in the material facts of culture was to accomplish a sort of theoretical positioning which allowed, not only ideological justification for the colonization of the other, but also the emergence of an historical self-understanding which positioned the West at the cutting edge of history and progress. Similarly, I will argue in this chapter that the identification of Chinese social space and Chinese women as being culturally different hardly functions as "objective" ethnography or social science, but is also constitutive of *Western* desire and self-understanding. Further, the identification of the social and cultural difference of the space of the other is not limited to its occurrence to the West; it is a practice done on *both* sides of the divide. This will be demonstrated by examining the case of historical roots of "democracy with Chinese characteristics."

6.2 "...and this good news"

After he had failed the imperial civil service examinations for the third time in 1837, Hong Huoxiu, the third son of a farming family from Guangdong province, falls into a delirium which lasted for forty days.[2] During this delirium, he journeys to a heavenly realm, in which he is reprimanded by his heavenly father, austere in his black

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[2] For more on Hong Xiuquan and the Taiping Rebellion, see Jonathan Spence, *God's Chinese Son: the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan*, (New York: Norton, 1996); John King Fairbank, *China: A New History*, (Cambridge: Belknap, 1992), especially chapter eleven; and Immanuel C. Y. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), especially chapter ten.

robes and beard, for being remiss in his duty— Hong has failed to drive out the devils who fill the realms of Heaven and Earth and everything in between. Given a sword, a wife, and moral instruction, Hong proceeds to enact his heavenly father's will, performing so well on the battlefields of Heaven that he is ordered to return to the earthly realm, there to continue his war against the evil demons. Thus, Hong recovers from his seemingly deathbound illness, reciting poems which he has composed during his stay in Heaven to his family, and excitedly sharing his new name: "Heavenly King, Lord of the Heavenly Way, Quan." His relatives, fearing that he has become incurably insane, watch the entrance to his room, but the rechristened Hong Xiuquan seemingly regains his faculties and returns to his job as schoolteacher.

Seven years later, after failing the examinations once again, Hong rereads the Christian tracts he acquired during his last trip and unlocks the secret of his delirium-dream: his dream-father is none other than the Christian God; his dream-brother, who had given him daily moral instruction, was Jesus Christ; and his dream-given mission to wage war on corrupt evil demons— the Manchurian Qing dynasty. Thus, fully believing that he was, in fact, the younger brother of Jesus, and never doubting his own divinity, Hong Xiuquan instigated the Taiping Rebellion of 1850-1864, which embroiled sixteen provinces in civil war, destroyed more than six hundred cities, and took the lives of at least twenty million Chinese.

It was, of course, inconceivable to Western missionaries that Hong's claim could be true, that he could indeed be the younger brother of Christ, this claim being at best a spurious revelation and probably blasphemy. The Rites Controversy (in which Leibniz was deeply engaged) over the religious status of ancestor worship and reverence for

Confucius having been decided long ago in favor of those who pronounced the Chinese to be yet another band of heathen unbelievers, Christian doctrine in China was seen as truth to be dispensed readymade and inalterable, and *not* a flexible doctrine to be adapted to fit Chinese sociopolitical conditions. With Western support— how could the Western powers, after all, lend support to someone who claimed to be the second son of God?— the dynastic forces were finally able to suppress the rebellion, reducing a mad, starving Hong Xiuquan to eating weeds inside the city walls of his besieged capital city of Nanjing, believing it to be manna sent from his Heavenly Father to sustain him. One wonders what Leibniz would have thought, had he seen these results of the transmission of Christianity into the space of the Chinese other and its adaptation by Hong.

But even if Christianity was to fail as an idea which could topple a Chinese dynasty, the idea of *democracy* was much more potent, greatly benefiting perhaps from the initial weakening of the dynastic regime during the Taiping Rebellion. What finally fundamentally transformed the structure of Chinese society was the attempt, initiated by Sun Yatsen, to reincarnate the Chinese nation as a *democratic* republic. The attempt to overthrow the now-corrupt Qing dynasty succeeded in 1911, but the installation of democracy was thwarted by military leaders with imperial ambitions, inadequate party organization and discipline, and poor indoctrination, remnants of the overthrown dynastic order.[3] Proclaimed the first President of the provisional Republic of China in 1911, Sun resigned his position to Yuan Shikai who, despite a pretense at accepting democratic ideas, nonetheless attempted to install himself as a new emperor in 1915. By

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[3] Immanuel C. Y. Hsü, *The Rise of Modern China*, Third Edition, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 519.

the time of his death in 1925, a "democratic" Republic of China was not yet reality, and Sun's last words were an exhortation to continue the work of democratic revolution: "The Revolution is not yet completed. All my comrades must strive on."[4]

But if Hong Xiuquan had misunderstood the Christian message as intended by the translators and publishers of those fateful tracts he read, giving it a Chinese reconfiguration, then what ought we to make of the translation of the idea of democracy into that strange, Chinese setting? We know, reading the recent media concerned with the death of Deng Xiaoping, that Mao later "perverted the idea of democracy," and that his emphasis on "proletarian democracy" is not, after all, "real" or "Western" democracy.[5] Democracy in a *Chinese* context has always been (or portrayed as?) a distorted version of its Western counterpart. The question, then, of determining just how Sun understood democracy is significant, for as the first ardent advocate of the creation of a specifically Chinese democracy, Sun's conception sets the stage for the articulation of a nation-culture firmly grounded upon the fundament of Western democratic ideals, but deliberately constructed with a distinctly Chinese architecture in mind. If one believes that sociocultural spaces are intact spheres which possess their own modes of signification and possibility, then Sun's translation of Western democracy into the Chinese social framework of signification represents the moment of democratic penetration— it is Sun who actively works to introduce the virus of democracy into the

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[4] Sun Yatsen, *The Principle of Democracy*, F. W. Price, trans., (Westport: Greenwood, 1970), pp. xi-xii.

[5] Nicolas Kristof writes in *The New York Times* of 23 February 1997 that: "...Mao and Mr. Deng both refused to try real democracy (and, of course, Mao meant proletarian democracy rather than any kind of Western approach)," p. 4:5.

Chinese social body, providing it with the Chinese masks which facilitate its social absorption and reproduction. In the interests of an excursion into the meaning of democracy as an idea capable of cultural migration and with an eye for the Chineseness of its articulation in that geopolitical space called "China," I want to turn to his lectures on democracy, given in March and April of 1924, one year before his death. An examination of this Chinese text on democracy might provide us with a preliminary sketch of some of the salient features of this *Chinese* version of democracy, features to be examined ultimately as part of the circuits which signify cultural difference.

6.3 Freedom, Terror, Power

The first lecture of the series is largely composed of a materialist account of the development of human societies and the concomitant evolution of political forms. Sun's historical narrative takes us from the "origin" of human social organization, the practical decision to band together to fight off wild "beasts" and other dangerous vicissitudes of nature, to the emergence of a precipitous tide of democratic thought marking the future form of human societies. Interposing theocracy and autocracy as intermediary forms of sociopolitical organization between the primitive defensive pact and the democratic ideal, Sun concludes that the mode of social organization of the future must be grounded firmly in the democratic ideal of the sovereignty of the people, since this represents the highest stage of the evolution of the forms of human society.[6] Indeed, this principle of the "People's Sovereignty" functions as the middle and central term of Sun's famous revolutionary slogan, the "Three Principles of the People." These "Three Principles"—

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[6] Sun Yatsen, *The Principle of Democracy*, F. W. Price, trans., (Westport: Greenwood, 1970), p. 19.

"People's Nationalism, People's Sovereignty, People's Livelihood"— are watchwords to be placed alongside such famous democratic slogans as "liberté, egalité, fraternité" and "of the people, by the people, for the people."

But Sun goes farther, asserting that this notion of the sovereignty of the people, (in a word, *democracy,*[7]) ought not to be understood in the terms through which it has been understood in the West. Having established the historical necessity which fuels the promulgation of the democratic ideal in Lecture One, Sun carefully distances himself in Lecture Two from the political ideologies which undergird Western instantiations of democracy, claiming that the inordinate (primarily French but ultimately Western) emphasis on "liberty" and "equality" does not apply to Chinese sociopolitical space:

> The peoples of Europe suffered so bitterly from despotism that as soon as the banner of liberty was lifted high, millions with one heart rallied about it. If we in China, where the people have not suffered such despotism, should make the cry of liberty, no attention would be paid to it.[8]

Not only does "liberty" not apply to Chinese space, it would also be unrecognized; liberty is radically forcign as a political slogan and ideal. In fact, given China's status at the time as a semi-colony of the European powers, Sun is quick to point out that the notion of liberty in its Chinese space refers to the liberty of *national* self-determination, and not the liberty of *individual* self-determination so fundamental in Western thought. Thus, instead of "liberty" becoming a revolutionary principle in and of itself, it is understood as inherently embedded within the idea of Chinese *nationalism:* "'Liberty' in

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[7] The term's "people's sovereignty" and "democracy" are rendered in Chinese with the same term, *minquan.* Thus, it is to be understood that the terms "democracy" and "people's sovereignty" are, to Sun, essentially the same.

[8] Sun Yatsen, *The Principle of Democracy*, F. W. Price, trans., (Westport: Greenwood, 1970), p. 31.

the French revolutionary watchword and 'People's Nationalism' in our watchword are similar. The People's Nationalism calls for freedom of our nation."[9]

Moreover, the fact of China's impending colonization means that what is necessary for a Chinese democratic revolution is precisely the *suppression* of individual liberty in the interest of forging a national, unified consciousness; the "sheet of loose sand" that represents a shifting and disunified Chinese sociality must be compressed into a "firm rock" upon which one can build. The task of national liberation from imperialist influence requires that national freedom be given priority over the preservation of individual liberty.[10] For Sun, it is ridiculous that a Chinese democratic revolution might be essentially built upon the notion of individual liberty and self-determination, since not only does the formation of a unified *national* consciousness condition the very possibility of individual liberty, but also because part of the reason for China's semi-colonization can be traced to the fact that Chinese individuals are "too free" already, and have always enjoyed a high level of individual freedom.[11]

Similarly, the privileged position of "equality" in Sun's revolutionary rhetoric is recast, both because it applies differently to the space of Chinese sociality, and because the Western formulation of equality is basically inadequate, since he believes it to be theoretically incorrect. A Chinese democratic government, if constructed upon the Western conception of equality, would be unstable and weak. Thus, in Lecture Three,

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[9] Sun Yatsen, *The Principle of Democracy*, F. W. Price, trans., (Westport: Greenwood, 1970), p. 38.
[10] Sun Yatsen, *The Principle of Democracy*, F. W. Price, trans., (Westport: Greenwood, 1970), pp. 36-7.
[11] Sun Yatsen, *The Principle of Democracy*, F. W. Price, trans., (Westport: Greenwood, 1970), pp. 33-35.

Sun argues against the idea that equality between citizens of a state is conferred by Nature, (the incorrect Western formulation), arguing instead that what is given to human beings is fundamentally *inequality,* since science has proven that "there is no principle of natural equality."[12] As a result, any democratic movement must take into account the fact that equality between individuals is not their "natural" state, but that the aim of the institution of democratic state structures is precisely the imposition of an artificial equality in the face of what is given by Nature. The problems of the autocratic and theocratic state structures lie not so much the fact that they are inherently structures of inequality, but that these structures magnify and intensify the "naturally" existing inequalities between individuals, producing despotic forms of "artificial" inequality.[13]

Given that the natural state of human social existence is inequality— a hierarchical ordering of human individuals ranked by natural abilities— the founders of a democratic republic must be careful not to impose a "false equality" in their zealousness to correct the social iniquities of artificial inequality. False equality occurs when the hierarchy of inequality is eliminated artificially by the unilateral "dumbing down" of the more skilled and talented among the citizenry. Like the nightmarish world envisioned in Kurt Vonnegut's short story "Harrison Bergeron,"[14] where a ruthless "United States Handicapper General" is put in charge of assigning the appropriate handicaps to those

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[12] Sun Yatsen, *The Principle of Democracy*, F. W. Price, trans., (Westport: Greenwood, 1970), p. 43.
[13] Sun writes: "Nature originally did not make man equal; but when autocracy developed among mankind, the despotic kings and princes pushed human differences to an extreme, and the result was an inequality far worse than Nature's inequality," p. 40.
[14] Kurt Vonnegut, "Harrison Bergeron," *Welcome to the Monkey House*, (New York: Dell, 1950), pp. 7-13.

who are not of average height, intelligence, strength, beauty, etc., the world of false equality is a dystopia governed by the least common denominator of human ability where the strengths and talents of specific individuals are forcibly suppressed into order to preserve an ideal of equality. Such a state, Sun believes, was precisely that established by the French Revolution— a false equality which necessitated the execution of many of the "good ears and eyes" of the people in the pursuit of the formation of a state of absolute equality.[15] Given that this preliminary French taste of democracy ultimately resulted in the collapse of the newly-formed Republic and the institution of Napoleon as emperor, Sun concludes that the historical record proves that adherence to an ideal of false equality does not aid the pursuit and development of stable forms of democracy.

A *true* equality must therefore account for the fact of natural inequality, as well as avoiding the terrifying excesses of the belief in absolute freedom and equality. True equality thus has its foundation in the establishment of a universal *political* equality.[16] That is, all citizens are provided with a base level of political power from which they are free to develop their own unique skills and lives. True equality does not, like false equality, necessitate the abstract universalization of the citizen; it does not require that everyone be equal in every respect. What it requires is that everyone be given equal access to the machinery of democracy and the composition of the government. Like a high-powered machine, the strong democratic government is simply a tool wielded by its owner. Those who actually govern are held in check by the fact that they are culpable to

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[15] Sun Yatsen, *The Principle of Democracy*, F. W. Price, trans., (Westport: Greenwood, 1970), pp. 70-72.
[16] Sun Yatsen, *The Principle of Democracy*, F. W. Price, trans., (Westport: Greenwood, 1970), p. 45.

the people for their actions. In a fashion analogous to the possession of an automobile (the owner of a car does *not,* for example, necessarily know the best way to drive or fix it) the citizens are the owners of the government; it is *their* possession.[17] This emphasis on the control inherent in the idea of ownership is what Westerners have missed in their democratic theorizing and has consequently led them to fear the formation of a powerful government, fearing that if the government is invested with too much power, the return to despotic autocracy is ineluctable. Coupled with the historically-conditioned Western fear of the loss of liberty, the failure to theorize the difference between the political power of the people and the administrative power of the government has resulted in the relative weakness of Western democracies, which fail to explore fully the possibilities of democracy.

Well-versed in the materialist methods of Western thought, Sun locates the origin of these Western emphases on "liberty" and "equality" and the Western insistence on the necessity of a weak central government in the West's historical conditions, arguing that Western democratic revolutionaries focused inordinately on these two ideas because they experienced a far more oppressive autocratic state than did the Chinese.[18] The relatively greater oppression which European peoples experienced thus led them to place primary emphasis on securing greater liberty and equality for themselves *as individuals* and to believe that the weaker the central government, the better the democracy. The Chinese conditions, however, are just the contrary— the Chinese have historically enjoyed

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[17] Sun Yatsen, *The Principle of Democracy*, F. W. Price, trans., (Westport: Greenwood, 1970), pp. 126-129.
[18] Sun Yatsen, *The Principle of Democracy*, F. W. Price, trans., (Westport: Greenwood, 1970), pp. 28-29.

greater equality and less oppression. The size and form of the administrative structures of Chinese dynastic rule have produced a situation in which all citizens are more or less equal, apart from the imposition of taxes, and a state in which there is very little direct presence of the autocratic iron fist. Further, the encroachment of foreign powers and the imminent threat of the reduction of the Chinese nation to the status of a pure colony mitigates the power of the argument that a Chinese democracy must coalesce around a *weak* central government; such a democracy would not last. The attempt to simply map the structural and ideological Western path to democratic revolution directly onto Chinese sociopolitical space then, is necessarily doomed to failure, since Western and Chinese political spaces are inherently *different.*[19]

The crucial effect of this difference has been that in Western democracies, the overarching emphasis on liberty and equality and the strident maintenance that in order for popular sovereignty to exist, government must be weak, results in the insistence on delimiting the power of the government. This insistence, Sun believes, has its origins in a fundamental mistake in the Western conceptualization of democracy— the Western failure to differentiate properly between *sovereignty* and *ability.*[20] Western democratic theorists have mistakenly assumed that the democratic rule of the people consists solely in keeping a tight rein on the powers of government, instead of properly understanding that those elected to government positions are chosen on the basis of their ability to

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[19] Sun Yatsen, *The Principle of Democracy*, F. W. Price, trans., (Westport: Greenwood, 1970), p. 88.

[20] He writes: "Westerners have not drawn a clear line between sovereignty and ability, so they have not yet solved the problems which have arisen out of democracy these two or three hundred years," p. 106.

govern. Thus, the kernel of democracy is contained, not in the edifices of a weak central government, but rather in the fact that those elected to government positions are "gifted men," in whose skills at governing the people place their unwavering trust.[21]

Thus in Sun's conception, a "real" democracy places democracy first, as the precondition of liberty and equality, and not the other way around. True democracy derives its strength from the bond of trust which exists between citizen and rulers, trust derived from the fact that those chosen to rule are chosen precisely because they possess the ability to govern well. After all, since what is given to the human condition is a natural inequality of skills, we cannot expect that all citizens will be *equally* capable of the tasks of government. Some citizens will be better skilled at governing than others. A Chinese democratic government which is built with these considerations in mind will be necessarily stronger than the democratic governments of the West, since the Chinese people will have completely and trustingly placed the power of governing in the hands of those who are most capable of it.

6.4 The Voting Machine

Disregarding the question of the accuracy of Sun's analysis of Western democracy, what must be noted throughout his lectures is his insistence that the Chinese sociopolitical space is inherently *different* from the space of the West. The social terrain is more level (the Chinese have enjoyed greater social equality) and more open (the Chinese have possessed greater individual liberty than Westerners). Further, although Westerners might have originally conceived the notion of democracy, the fact that

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[21] Sun Yatsen, *The Principle of Democracy*, F. W. Price, trans., (Westport: Greenwood, 1970), pp. 101-109.

Western political theorists are still engaged in rereading Plato and other democratic theorists of antiquity suggests to Sun that Western political thought has not kept pace with Western science. Why follow in the footsteps of Western theorists who, two thousand years later, have still not succeeded in comprehending the work of their ancients? Indeed: "...the advance of Western political philosophy has not kept pace with the advance of Western material science. There has been no radical change in political thinking for two thousand years."[22] What is needed in the *Chinese* space is thus a democratic government which instantiates, as the logical result of sociopolitical evolution, the democracy inherent in *Chinese* culture. This democratic government is to be built, not on the bedrock assumption of Nature-given individual liberty and equality, but upon the sacrifice of a portion of that liberty in the name of the forging of a national will, a will of the *Chinese* people.

Proof positive of the inherently democratic nature of Chinese culture is established by demonstrating the existence of the democratic impulses embedded within Chinese philosophical thought. Thus, by means of a democratic relay traced through various historical examples ultimately linked up to the thought of Confucius and Mencius, Sun attempts to argue both for the historical necessity of democracy, as well as for its intrinsic presence and suitability for the Chinese:

> Confucius and Mencius two thousand years ago spoke for people's rights. Confucius... was pleading for a free and fraternal world in which the people would rule.... Mencius... in his age, already saw that kings were unnecessary and would not last forever.... Thus China more than two milleniums ago had already considered the idea of democracy, but at that time she could not put it into operation. Democracy was then what

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[22] Sun Yatsen, *The Principle of Democracy*, F. W. Price, trans., (Westport: Greenwood, 1970), p. 84.

> foreigners call a Utopia, an ideal which could not be immediately realized.[23]

In Sun's conceptualization, democracy has always already been a Chinese idea. The exigencies of history have prevented its realization in China until now, but given the fact that the West has now been able to found democratic republics, China ought not to resist the democratic tide, but give itself over to it completely.

Recognition of the necessity and superiority of democracy as a political form does not subsequently entail the mindless adoption of Western structures. For since Sun maintains the essential difference of the Chinese sociopolitical space, the straightforward adoption and practice of Western democratic methods is *dangerous:*

> What methods shall we use in applying the democracy which we have adopted from the West? Only after we have thought through these methods will democracy be adapted to our use. If we insist on using democracy without careful preparation beforehand, we will find it extremely dangerous and liable to kill us.[24]

Protection from the dangers of democracy is to be secured by, not curtailing the powers of a democratic government, but by creating the strongest possible government coupled with the meritocratic selection of government members. What guarantees the Chineseness of the Chinese form of democracy will be precisely the absolute identification of the will of the Chinese people with those who govern. The new and improved, democratic and strong Chinese nation is to be built upon the firmament of a government voted into office on the basis of their ability to govern well, and not upon the unstable foundations of the ideas of individual liberty and equality. It is the

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[23] Sun Yatsen, *The Principle of Democracy*, F. W. Price, trans., (Westport: Greenwood, 1970), pp. 11-13.
[24] Sun Yatsen, *The Principle of Democracy*, F. W. Price, trans., (Westport: Greenwood, 1970), p. 132.

construction of democracy which conditions the possibility of social liberty and equality, and not the reverse. Chineseness is actualized, not in the free expression of individual wills loosely governed by a weak central government, but by the complete identification of the government with the will of the Chinese people, an identification which, paradoxically, is the very basis of freedom itself.

This identification of the will of the people and the government of the democratic state is not new. Indeed, Rousseau, in *The Social Contract*, maintains that the act of voting serves to determine what the general will of the people actually is. In the event of discovering, after voting, that s/he had not voted for the winning side, the voter ought to come to recognize that "...I have made a mistake, and that what I believed to be the general will was not so. If my particular opinion had prevailed against the general will, I should have done something other than what I had willed, and then I should not have been free."[25] Thus, the act of voting, although an individual act, is nonetheless only the vehicle whereby the "will of the people" as a democratic governmental directive makes itself real. The fact that, for example, a presidential candidate lost although I voted for him/her, simply demonstrates that I have been mistaken as to what the general will of the people is in its actuality.

In his "discovery" of the theoretical separation between the sovereignty of the people and the administrative power of the government elected by the people, Sun can be seen to make the same assumption. Sun's advocacy of democracy takes the form, in numerous points in the six lectures, of suggesting that the instantiation of democracy in

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[25] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Maurice Cranston, trans., (New York: Penguin, 1968, pp. 151-154.

China is essentially "making king" the four hundred million people of China (which, we assume, are those who he believes should possess suffrage).[26] Despite the fact that Sun adds the three additional powers of "recall," "initiative," and "referendum" to the mechanism of "universal suffrage" as guarantors of popular control over the government which rules in the name of the people, what underlies the power accorded to these mechanisms is the fact that they serve as expressions of a unified will of the Chinese people. The meaningful *absence* of any discussion on how to deal with dissent *among* the people— the usual theoretical considerations of the advantages and disadvantages of simple majority, supermajority, proportional representation, and all the other practical possibilities for administering the vote— suggests either the failure to make such considerations or, in light of Sun's advocacy of a strong, unified China, the belief in the singular and unanimous unity of a "will of the people," the heterogeneous opinions of four hundred million individuals fused into one homogeneous collective will.[27]

The belief that the government acts on behalf of the will of the people, however determined, is a central component to the democratic machine, as can be witnessed by the necessity, even in the most "repressive" of governmental structures, of making reference to the "people" as an abstract body whose interests are served by the actions of

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[26] See, for example, Sun Yatsen, *The Principle of Democracy*, F. W. Price, trans., (Westport: Greenwood, 1970), pp. 96, 105-106, and 134.

[27] In his preliminary elaboration on the power of the referendum, for example, Sun writes that "If *everybody* thinks that an old law is not beneficial *to the people*, they should have the power to amend it and to ask the government to administer the revised law and do away with the old law," p. 134, [emphases added]. The choice of "everybody" and not "some of the people," coupled with the fact that that the old law is understood to be not beneficial "to the people" instead of simply "to them" strongly suggests the theoretical assumption of a separation between the "people's will" and "the people" themselves.

the government. What appears as an operative difference between those democracies which are "repressive" and those which are "truly democratic" is the activity of voting. Non-democratic governments are those which either do not permit the holding of elections or, if they are permitted, either deny their results or "rig" them.[28] Thus, although the *New York Times* article evaluating the death of Deng Xiaoping claims that the "democracy" which Mao constructed in China "was much more popular with ordinary people than most communist countries" (one *must* ask why "communist" is necessary here), that democracy is necessarily "perverted" because the people do not vote.[29]

But although the act of voting might be understood as central to the democratic essence of a state, the fact that those countries which do not engage in the practice of holding elections are nonetheless considered to possess a culture (indeed, the failure to hold elections is sometimes considered to be rooted in the practices of that culture itself) indicates that the holding of elections cannot function to mark cultural difference. Even if, as in the case of the democratic apparatus advocated by Sun, the results of the elections make real the will of the Chinese people, this Chineseness is not produced *by* the voting process, but is rather permitted its most real existence by this vote. In other words, the utility of democracy is precisely the fact that it permits the apparently truest manifestation of the will of *a* people to emerge. Thus, the paradoxical relation of

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[28] This is, of course, a hypothesis, but one which I suspect will be easily be supported by a quick perusal of popular media presentations of those states which are labeled "non-democratic."

[29] Nicholas D. Kristof, "The Communist Dynasty Had Its Run. Now What?" *The New York Times*, 23 February 1997, pp. 4:1, 4:5.

democracy to freedom hinted at earlier in the discussion of Sun's emphasis on national liberty over individual liberty is intensified by the further paradox that it is precisely the "universal" applicability of democracy as a governmental ideal which enables the differentiation of individual states— each the bearer of a (culturally?) unique will, each a geopolitically distinct entity which realizes the unity of a popular will while maintaining that unity as *different from* the will of others.

But Sun was seemingly mistaken about the possibility of instantiating democracy in Chinese space, for what emerged was the "non-democratic" structures of the "communist" People's Republic. Following the defeat and retreat to Taiwan of the Guomindang, the party oppositional to the Chinese Communist Party, the new nation-state established on the mainland was built along the guidelines of Marxist-Leninist (and later Mao Zedong) thought. I have already hinted at the fact that the identification of the People's Republic as "non-democratic" is problematic, but the question we are faced with now is why this identification would have occurred. Why would this communist regime be identified as non-democratic if, as the *New York Times* claims, it was "more popular with ordinary people" than most regimes? Does this popularity not suggest the possession of one of the salient features of "democracy?" What is needed apart from popular support for the status of democracy?

It is a commonplace of contemporary nation-states to promote propaganda which confers upon its enemies the status of being, not only different, but completely despotic and totalitarian, whether this is done by a nation-state which claims that its enemies are false, bourgeois democracies or by a nation-state which claims that its enemies are totalitarian states ruled by the iron fist. In the case of China, there is certainly nothing

unusual in the everyday claims that it is a regime which stifles the expression of individuality in the interests of the collective. But the question remains as to what is operating behind these banal and relatively uninteresting claims. Why would we feel it so necessary to proclaim that the Chinese other is a communist totalitarianism whose populace desperately desires democracy. What does this tell us about the desires which ground the identification of the cultural other and about "our" relationship with this other?

6.5 The Möbius Band

As a preliminary hypothesis, my reading of the relationship between China and the West is, to borrow its formulation from Zizek, that they "relate to each other like two surfaces of Möbius band: by progressing far enough on one surface, we suddenly find ourselves on the opposite surface."[30] The Möbius band is a shape obtained (in its simplest form) by taping the ends of a strip of paper together, after twisting the strip once, so that no matter where one begins, one can trace an unbroken line around both sides of the paper. Thus, the Möbius figure transforms a two-sided strip of paper into a shape with only one side. The imagery of the Möbius band is used by Zizek precisely to show that what often appears farthest away (ontologically, epistemologically, culturally, and so on) is also that which is, with a twist in perspective, *closest.* Examined from the point of view of traditional sinology and official political analyses, the Chinese are vastly different from us Americans— *They* are the direct inheritors of an ancient culture utterly different from ours, *they* do not live in a free society characterized by democracy (and

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[30] Slavoj Zizek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment*, (London: Verso, 1994), pp.2-3.

therefore want it), *their* language is pictographic and thus leads them to remain focused on the immanent, whereas we in the West live in a historically youthful culture, we actually have democracy, our alphabetic language frees us from the distraction of the image to ponder the abstract forms of things. But is there really just *absolute difference* between the West and China, between the adherents of Taoism and Hegelian monists? Or might there be all-too-dangerous similarities, rather than pure difference, between the "rigid social ethics of Confucius" and those of Aristotle, between the totalitarian state structure of China and the structures of American democracy?

The point here is not to *collapse* the perceived distance between China and the West but to recognize that this distance is symptomatic of the very perception of alterity itself. In other words, it is perhaps not the case, as in popular phenomenological accounts of alterity, that alterity comes *after* the fact of distance between us and the other, that we notice the other only because we notice that they are far away. This might have been the case before the dramatic increase in the interfusion of human populations and the development of transportation technologies destroyed the idea of geographically-isolated human communities. Now, it might perhaps be more fruitful to think of the reverse— it is the very presumption of alterity which forces us into constructing and maintaining some form of distance. It is only because we *already expect* the Chinese to be different from us that we are able to encode the proper sorts of distance between them and us. One finds the same sort of popular logic at work in the demarcation of ethnic boundaries in cities where populations of various ethnicities are forced to live in close proximity with one another. Here, the lack of a *physical* distance forces the transposition of intercommunal distance onto the plane of "culture." What marks the

difference between "us" and "them" is an infinite chasm that yawns between what is understood to be two mutually incomprehensible *cultural* spaces. As a result, it makes no difference whether or not China actually "lies at the other end of the world"; the presumed cultural gap between China and the West is such that no bridging is seemingly possible.

Thus, the presumption of the independence of cultures can be seen as a historical relic, a residue from times in which physical distance could be directly mapped onto cultural distance. Given the globalization of capital and the ensuing interfusion of human populations from previously isolated and thus "distinct" cultures, the preservation of a notion of cultural purity is a sign that this cultural purity *has already been lost*. Rather than being a battle call to preserve vanishing cultures, the concern over cultural purity is a form of nostalgia generated by the perceived hopelessness of maintaining cultural identity. What, then, is the nostalgia at work in the Western (here specifically, American) desire to see democracy flower in China?[31]

6.6 In the Delivery Room

It is evident that although the current focus on China is on its "human rights violations," the attitudes which American spectators displayed as the events of June 1989 unfolded betrays something else— a certain fascination, not only with the culture of the Other, but also with *democracy*. For in June 1989, China offered Americans a rare

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[31] The dedication of Merle Goldman's recent book, *Sowing the Seeds of Democracy in China: Political Reform in the Deng Xiaoping Era,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), reads: "For my children... who may someday see democracy flower in China." One wonders why her children have such a vested interest in witnessing the flowering of democracy in China.

historical possibility— those with television sets could witness a media-mediated version of their own traumatic birth, the emergence of *democracy* in a nation known to be communist. And why not? The Berlin Wall had fallen, Eastern European nations were embracing the market, and there, on the television screen, the abstract idea of democracy possessed the immediate reality of the nightly news. "Look! They want what we have!"— an attitude which betrayed an underlying belief not only that democracy was about to be born again (and in a country on the "other side of the world), but also that this was what democracy was all about. Forgetting, of course, that a similar-sized protest outside of the White House might be met with the same sort of government crackdown.

But the opportunity of narcissistic enjoyment offered by the spectacle of Tiananmen to Americans was shanghaied— democracy did *not* prevail, and the ensuing months brought only the depressing news of the harsh government persecution of dissidents, executions and jailings. The excitement generated by the chance for Americans to relive the birth of their own political system evaporated into cynicism as what followed Tiananmen was not, as is usual in moral parables, the punishment of the evildoer and the vindication of righteousness, but actually the reverse. In the years since 1989, the West has witnessed (to its horror?) the spectacular growth of the Chinese economy, and the American popular press is filled with stories about the capitalistic self-destruction of Chinese culture in the midst of an all-consuming passion to make money, become wealthy, and acquire the latest in consumer goods.[32] Thus, the narcissistic

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[32] See, for example, the entire 1 April 1996 issue of *Newsweek*, which opens its discussion of the "China Question" with: "After 500 years of humiliation, a surging China is about to

opportunity which China now offers Americans is perhaps something a little more frightening— the birth of *capitalism* in all its attendant glory.[33]

6.7 The Gaze of the Other

Surely there is something paradoxical here, for although a sizable proportion of Western sino-analysis in the wake of Tiananmen suggests that the *Chinese cultural tradition* was its underlying basis, it is precisely the loss of this culture that is mourned in observations about China's increasingly capitalist, market-driven economy.[34] Here we might make the Zizekian observation that what "China" is doing is this: returning to the West the repressed truth of its own democratic desire.[35] We in America *want* democracy to spread to distant lands, we want them to become "like us," but we simultaneously also do *not* want them to become like us— we want to maintain the distance of alterity that allows us to maintain our coherence as a cultural unity. And at the same time, the success of "Chinese capitalism" horrifies us with the unthinkable implication that democracy and capitalism are ultimately *incompatible social systems*. A successful "true" democracy cannot serve as the support for a capitalist economy. After all, the United States has had a long and painful history of supporting decidedly "non-

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reclaim its historical position as one of the world's great powers. But will the reborn China be a friend to the West— or a daunting foe?" p. 24.

[33] Witness, for example, Richard Madsen's observation that "Knowledge of China is not 'optional' for Americans in the age of global telecommunication and commerce. We will increasingly be forced to make important decisions about how our economic, political, and cultural institutions should relate to China. But if we do not understand the meaning of the relationships, we will be at their mercy," *China and the American Dream: A Moral Inquiry*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 26.

[34] See, for example, Orville Schell's piece "Twilight of the Titan: China— The End of an Era" in *The Nation*, 17 July 1995, pp. 84-98.

[35] Slavoj Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 208.

democratic" regimes in Central and South America, in order to preserve the economic stability vital to American business concerns.

Consequently, behind the economic competitiveness which grounds contemporary American anxiety about China, there lies also a fear of the theft of enjoyment, that somehow the Chinese might derail our democratic desire. It is as if, given that democracy and capitalism are incompatible, the fear of China is based upon the realization that it is only under continued totalitarian control that this economic growth is able to take place. Hence, the current focus of US-China relations, the thorny issue of "human rights," has underlying it the admonition that China's success is due only to the fact that the Chinese state possesses a control over its population which is impossible in the West because of its supposed "democratic heritage."

What I am suggesting here is that part of the Western fascination with China is that it embodies, as that distanced Other, what the West wishes it were (in the sense of possessing a centuries-old "continuous culture"), as well as what it once was— the youthful child who still believed in democracy. This, in fact, is what constitutes the relationship as fundamentally narcissistic, for it is not only its cultural ego-ideal which the West seeks in China, but the fact that China offers a chance for the jaded "mature" West to "flee to the child," as Freud would put it.[36] It is almost as if, wearied by its tireless role as the ethical imperative of the world, America looks at China the way an older

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[36] See "On Narcissism: an Introduction," *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, James Strachey, trans., (London: Hogarth Press, 1959), vol. fourteen.

child, overburdened by familial demands, looks with envy at a younger child whose temper tantrums are still treated with greater latitude.

But let us not forget that there is more than one gaze here and more than *one* narcissism. In the case of China and America, what we have are two inseparable fascinated gazes, both of which operate to sustain cultural distance in a narcissistic fashion. Rey Chow, in her remarkable study on contemporary Chinese cinema, claims that contemporary Chinese cinema represents the development of a sort of autoethnography, an attempt to address the paradoxical relationship between nature and culture as experienced in "third world" countries.[37] This autoethnography takes the form of a desire to see a *new* China, a desire to finally come to terms with China's contradictory position as both *victim* (of past imperialist aggressions), and as *empire* (possessor of a five thousand year old "culture"). What we have here is more than simply self-(re)definition, for this process takes place *self-consciously*, with the awareness that what one does, what one chooses to display, is done so for the gaze of an Other, here America and the West.

We can get a glimpse of the performative function embedded within Chinese cultural production in the common use of the pejorative phrase: *zuo gei waiguoren kan*, which literally means "to do/done for foreigners to look at." Indeed, it is the Western media which are often blamed for the precipitation of violence at Tiananmen— forced to ever higher spirals of tension generated by the consciousness that the gaze of the world was upon them, it became increasingly difficult for both the protesters and the official

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[37] Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), chapter one.

state regime to back down from their respective positions.[38] Thus, although Zizek, in reference to the West's fascination with the dissolution of communism in Eastern Europe, speaks of "two mutually fascinated gazes,"[39] it is not simply, as he supposes, that these two gazes are *both* located within the West. For Zizek, the returned gaze is the one which the West *believes its Other to have*, "the supposedly naive gaze by means of which Eastern Europe stares back at the West, fascinated by its democracy."[40]

The problem with the Zizekian perspective is exactly this: his developments of Lacanian theory necessitates the existence of only *one* Symbolic Order, whereas the fundamental basis for the construction of the cultural Other seems to require, particularly in the case of China, at least *two* Symbolic Orders. These are, obviously, narcissistically dependent on each other, but without the existence of the second, *Chinese* Symbolic, one is left with no way of understanding what it means to *zuo gei waiguoren kan*, to do something specifically for the gaze of the Western Other. In other words, Zizek's understanding of the specular relationship between the West and its Others leaves unexamined the fact that the West functions as the Other *for its own others*. Zizek's world-picture is that of the narcissistic ego, gazing out at the world, seeing only itself, whereas the picture of the world generated by the addition of another Symbolic is perhaps more like that seen in Paul Klee's etching "Two Men Meet, Each Supposing the Other to Be of Higher Rank," where the image is that of two distorted, self-absorbed

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[38] For a typical appraisal of the role of the media in Tiananmen, see Madsen's *China and the American Dream*.
[39] Slavoj Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 200.
[40] Slavoj Zizek, *Tarrying with the Negative*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 200.

figures, each mechanically performing the necessary ritual acknowledgment of the other, lost in whatever interior worlds they possess and blind to the "facts" of the situation.

It is in this context that we might, following Chow's subtle analysis, understand the function of the Chinese "arthouse" films which have been so popular of late. These films, she is careful to point out, do not simply portray China to the West, but in many cases, portray China to *itself*. That is, films like *Yellow Earth, Raise the Red Lantern, Ju Dou* and so forth, are not pure cultural artifacts, but represent an *active response* to the demanding Orientalist gaze of the West. Chow ultimately argues that the visuality which emerges from contemporary Chinese cinema is one in which the traditional binary opposition between observer/observed is *consciously* taken up. That is, in the autoethnography that constitutes contemporary Chinese film, what we see is the assignation of primacy, not to the act of observing, but to "being-looked-at-ness," for as Chow asserts, "being-looked-at-ness, rather than the act of looking, constitutes the primary event in cross-cultural representation."[41] Obviously, this self-consciousness is dependent upon the existence of the West, but the point here is that this self-consciousness is not *reducible* to a function of the West. For if it is the case that the West narcissistically enjoys what it sees of itself in the other of China, that relationship is, on the other side of the mirror of Western narcissism, reproduced— it is only against the measuring stick of "the West" that "China" can emerge as a national entity, as a national "Thing."

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[41] Rey Chow, *Primitive Passions*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), p. 180.

6.8 *Zhaole*: The Distance of the Other

And so today, China stands as the representative of "a new Asian hedonism." This *zhaole*, this "seeking enjoyment," is curiously the opposite of the popular vision of Japan, that nation of zealous workers unable to properly enjoy themselves. Here what is at issue is that the Chinese *enjoy themselves too much*— they have lapsed into an "ahistoricism" that renders life into a pastiche of moment-to-moment pleasure-seeking.[42] In this case, where we might suppose that there ought to be some sort of relief in the discovery that "our way of enjoyment" here in the West truly is superior to theirs and that, thank God, they have finally come to acknowledge our superior modes of enjoyment, we find instead the expression of anger and regret that in the midst of this enjoyment, "their culture" is being lost.

What is happening here is not simply the mourning of the loss of another culture, but also an active desire to maintain the proper distance between us and the Chinese. For unless we can suppose that they are indeed other to us, separated from us by a great distance, the circuit of narcissistic projection threatens to collapse— the proximity of the other prohibits the functioning of the social narcissism upon which social subjectivity is grounded. In other words, the situation is the same as the scene from the James Bond film *Dr. No*, where a meeting of the team of special agents out to infiltrate Dr. No's organization is abruptly disrupted by a young Chinese woman, presumably an operative of Dr. No, who takes a snapshot of the supposedly secret agents, and thus reveals the *other gaze*, the returned gaze of the object under investigation. The woman must be

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[42] Curiously, this could read as a description of the American cultural ethos, could it not?

chased and the photograph retrieved, not only because this photograph allows the agents to be identified, but precisely because the photograph reconstitutes the active subjectivity of the secret agents as the passive objectivity of a gazed-upon object. Thus, the maintenance of distance from the cultures of the other is the result of a concern with one's own subjective stability. The concern over the decay of Chinese culture under capitalist tendencies then, is at root an excessive obsession with America's own "cultural decay." Furthermore, the obsession with Chinese democracy is thus the manifestation of the concern over the thorny problems America faces in its own version of democracy. What are the proper limits of "free speech?" Recently, the concern with American democracy has focused on the fact that it has perhaps gone too far, supporting the laziness of welfare recipients, opening the door too wide to foreigners who come in and take American jobs while stubbornly refusing to assimilate.

But if this is true, that the perception of distance is part of the social mechanisms regulating the perception and conceptualization of alterity, then we seemed to be faced with a double-bind. We wish to maintain that the difference among cultures ought to be "respected," but we find that the very possibility of showing the proper respect towards another culture ensures that it will always remain other, condemned, no matter how many times we watch its ritual dances or eat its food, to an existence in the field of alterity. In this, most multicultural of ages, it is perhaps disconcerting to suspect that alterity is inescapable, but is that really the problem? Or is it more that, as we become more and more conscious of others, we are increasingly confronted with *ourselves?* This line of argument has hopefully served to point out the direction in which the examination of cultural intersections sheds some light on the desire for democracy. As such, it is

intended only as the first steps of a deeper analysis. To further suggest avenues of debate, let us now to turn to a brief examination of the attempt to theorize the Chinese body, specifically, the figure of the Chinese *woman*.

6.9 Our Sexes and Theirs

> I wish I'd been able to write the *bodies* of Chinese women: full-blown, even buxom, from the effects of age or repeated pregnancies; but always with oval contours, floating, barely touching the ground.
>
> —Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*

> The reason I have great trouble is that I have a body. When I no longer have a body, what trouble have I?
>
> —*Dao De Jing*, chapter thirteen

If the notion of democracy refuses to acknowledge the material *bodies* of its abstracted "citizens," the *cultural* body is not so easily ignored. For although it may be argued that the "body" necessary for the conceptualization of democracy is an abstracted one, with no special characteristics save for the fact that it belongs to some form of political union, this abstracted conception of the body is concomitant with the status of democracy as a universal concept which is capable of being applied within *any* social context and which can, though it may require alterations, remain unstained by its (Western) cultural origins. In other words, democracy, precisely because it conceptualizes the human individual living within it as the universal citizen, devoid of any specific features which might be cause for preferential treatment, can function perfectly well if the bodies of its citizens are not marked by various identities (sexual, racial, cultural, etc.). But unlike the concept of democracy however, the body itself does not escape the inscription of identity quite so easily and in fact, the presumption that the

body which underpins democratic state structures is somehow freed from the ascription of various social identities is itself problematic.[43] Far from being simply the contingent containers of human "spirits," bodies are codified into distinct (if often contradictory) categories, each delineable by reference to certain markers. The ease with which one might fill out a census form or answer the "personal data" questions on an application attest to the fact of these codifications. The peculiar ease with which bodies lend themselves to the processes of the social inscription of identity thus points us in the direction of another difficulty which addresses itself to the "problem of China" and which we might begin to analyze with reference to the theoretical flashpoint of democracy.

Apart from the image of the lone, unidentified man stopping, as if by sheer force of will, a line of ominous tanks, the other predominant icon of the Tiananmen Square demonstrations of 1989 was that of the "Goddess of Liberty," a twenty-eight foot statue erected by the students as a symbol of their protest. Although the obvious comparisons were made between the American Statue of Liberty and this Goddess of Liberty, the fact remains that this statue was predominantly read by both Western and Chinese thinkers *as Chinese*. In his critique of Rey Chow's essay, "Violence in the Other Country: Preliminary Remarks on the 'China Crisis,'" Zhang Longxi takes Chow to task precisely for her refusal to recognize the *Chinese* body of the statue. Arguing that Chow's project of deconstructing democracy requires the theoretical understanding of the Goddess of Liberty as a white woman (and thus, ultimate symbol of freedom), Zhang cites various

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[43] See, for example, the discussion of "marked" and "unmarked" populations as part of the mechanism of racism in Robert John Ackermann, *Heterogeneities*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), pp. 15-24.

(Western!) sources to demonstrate the contrary: that the goddess instead possesses Chinese features and is thus a uniquely Chinese image.[44] To pose an analytic question but with very non-analytic purposes: just how is it that Zhang is certain of the Goddess' Chineseness? What is it that renders this Chineseness visible? If the body is thus somehow the site of the social inscription of identity, then the question which we face now is that of the status of the peculiarly *Chinese* body. For unless we assume that there are certain morphologies which can be adequately employed in the determination of cultural identity, we must ask how Zhang *recognizes* the Chinese features of the Goddess of Liberty as such. What is it, apart from the exigencies of physical morphology, which outlines the contours of the Chinese body? What discursive practices have constituted the Chinese body as such and is it productive or useful to continue to subscribe to these?

The body has, of course, long been the province of feminist theorists, concerned with demonstrating the social and non-natural sources of sex/gender differentiation. The body, far from being a natural object with characteristics to be read off of its surfaces, becomes instead the site of contestation, with various social pressures brought to bear upon in, in order to *produce* sex/gender differences. What is central to the feminist project of comprehending the body is the production of a counterdiscourse which can act to liberate the feminine body from the social forces which seek to repress the meanings coded onto that body. In light of this, I wish to turn now to the bodies of *Chinese women*, for it is here that the bodily marking of *both* gender and culture are

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[44] Zhang Longxi, "Western Theory and Chinese Reality," *Critical Inquiry* 19:1, pp. 119-120.

concentrated, and thus here that the differences between the articulation of embodied gender and embodied culture could be most fruitfully compared. To begin to offer an analysis of precisely this "difference"— how the body is inscribed with cultural meaning by processes different from those which inscribe sex/gender— let us look at Julia Kristeva's *About Chinese Women.*

6.10 Escape from the Law of the Father

Following Lacan's dictum that "The woman does not exist,"[45] Kristeva complements the psychoanalytic argument that since social space (the set of linguistic structures which, taken together, might be said to constitute "culture") derives its existence from the "Law of the Father" made manifest in the castration complex, the position of women is thus not simply non-existence, but non-existence of a special sort. The non-existence of women within the spatio-temporal dimension of the Symbolic made real by the Paternal Law is in fact guaranteed by its founding moment for if "women" exist, it is only by means of a fundamental identification with the Father. This identification is, however, tenuous, and broken as soon as woman recognizes the truth about herself, that there is something to her that escapes this identification: the "dream of the maternal body" and its complicity in the *jouissance*[46] of the feminine.[47]

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[45] For a discussion of the meaning of this seemingly misogynist formulation, see chapter six of Slavoj Zizek, *The Metastases of Enjoyment*, (London: Verso, 1994).

[46] "Jouissance" is a French term meaning "enjoyment," but containing as well a sexual connotation. The word is consequently untranslated in English editions of Lacan. For a concise definition, see the entry for "jouissance" in Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis,* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 91-2.

[47] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, Anita Barrows, trans., (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), pp. 34-5.

What characterizes the position of women within the patriarchal structures of society is consequently an exclusion from the position of power while simultaneously functioning as the very condition of that power, for it is by excluding women from its signifying frameworks that the Symbolic acquires its legitimacy— not everyone can be the emperor. The political fallout from this is of course the subsequently doomed nature of feminist projects which simply strive to assert the existence of women. For if women are excluded from the Symbolic as its founding moment, there can never be a "place" for the articulation of what "being woman" means— it will always already be inscribed within a *masculine* framework. The strategy of feminism then, ought to be grounded upon disruptions to that framework, located for Kristeva in the semiotic, pre-Oedipal, libidinal multiplicity which makes itself manifest in poetic language.[48] The expression of poetic language is furthermore tantamount to the recovery of the maternal body within the very terms of signification permitted by the strictures of the Symbolic, for if it is the case that the birth of the subject is rooted in the separation from the maternal body, then resistance to the Paternal Law which functions as the principle of the Symbolic can only be grounded in the return to what has been repressed.

Putting aside the problems with this position, such as those articulated by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*, there is something else which merits attention and which returns us to an examination of the cultural body. This is the fact that the process delineated above, the emergence of subjectivity in the repression of the maternal body, seems to be a uniquely *Western* phenomenon. Kristeva is careful to restrict, in the

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[48] See the succinct discussion of Kristeva's position in Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 79-91.

opening chapters of *About Chinese Women,* the conceptualization of the Symbolic as rooted in the repression of the maternal to the West, for to begin with, "...the role of women and, consequently, that of the family, have a particular quality in China which is unknown in the monotheistic West."[49] This difference of role is situated, Kristeva holds, in the originally *matrilineal* character of an ancient Chinese civilization living in a different relation to the earth: "No Father, no unifying Word. *A Mother:* the Ancestress and a *place* of sexual jousting represent the logic and cohesion of the society."[50] Without the social differentiation of sexes, what emerges as the governing logic of Chinese culture is, instead of a transcendent principle on the level of the Law of the Father in the West, an *immanence:*

> In other words, there is no isolatable symbolic principle to oppose itself and assert itself as transcendent law. It seems hardly an accident that this *immanence* was conceived by a society whose first family model is so marked by matrilinear descent and by the alteration of the two sexes, without an isolated symbolic authority aside from the principle of genitality and the economic/territorial contract.[51]

Even Mao acknowledges the position of the mother within the Chinese sexual economy[52] and thus the otherness of China coheres around the enigma of "the Mother at the center," the lingering traces of matrilineal descent and its consequences for the structure of the (Chinese?) Symbolic.

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[49] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, Anita Barrows, trans., (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 13.
[50] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, Anita Barrows, trans., (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 49.
[51] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, Anita Barrows, trans., (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 54.
[52] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, Anita Barrows, trans., (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 61.

Strangely enough, the ascription of "immanence" as an originary feature of Chinese culture does not require the machinery of psychoanalytic theory for its discovery; we have already seen its origins in the process of properly differentiating Western philosophy from Chinese philosophy. What *is* unique to Kristeva is here the location of the source of this immanence in the socialized *bisexuality* of ancient Chinese culture. A bisexuality which, to be sure, will be quickly colonized by Confucian ideology, but one which, in its primitive form, does not repress feminine *jouissance* in the act of maintaining the Symbolic. Rather, since "She [the tribal mother] is portrayed as the party whose right to *jouissance* is incontestable,"[53] the absence of a prohibition upon the expression of feminine *jouissance* (the prohibitive ground of the Western Symbolic) opens the space for a sexual relation which does not demand the negation of one sex in the desire of the other, transforming the immanence of the Chinese ordering principle into a "balance" within the relation between the sexes: "...this feminine *jouissance*, that could become the support of the mystery [of the sexual relation], the ultimate source of God, the Absolute, does not do so in China; for it is constantly counterbalanced by the other, the *yang*, which certainly takes for itself and gives of itself, but not every time."[54]

What is established here is the location of a form of male-female relation which is untainted by the structures which dominate such relations in the "monotheistic West." And as such, the possibility of a sexual relation unmediated by the Law of the Father

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[53] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, Anita Barrows, trans., (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 61.
[54] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, Anita Barrows, trans., (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 63.

conditions the possibility that the (Western) Symbolic is not the only way of doing things, and that other possibilities exist for the emergence of the social and are perhaps viable options to the patterns established in the West. Indeed, female masturbation and lesbianism, practices and identifications which, for Kristeva, cannot be articulated within the Western Symbolic, are commonly accepted practices in Chinese space which do not possess the Western status of "perversion." What is foreclosed in this ancient Chinese "bisexuality," is the attempt to escape the confines of one's kind, an attempt to be other than what one is:

> Female sexuality and masturbation are not merely 'tolerated'— they are taken for granted and considered to be perfectly 'natural.' Sexual treatises provide detailed descriptions of lesbian and masturbatory techniques, some of them quite sophisticated. What *is* problematic is the woman who cheats: the one who tries to pass for a man, who perverts the *yin/yang* duality by acting as a rather brutal, domineering male seducer.[55]

But if we are already describing an Other-Symbolic, then what exactly has become of sexual difference itself? After all, the formation of sexual identity is, in psychoanalytic theory, dependent upon one's relation to the Law of the Father and the possession of the phallus. How is sexual difference understood within a Symbolic which does not admit of such a Law and which is founded on what seems to be its radical Other? Kristeva's text does not provide us with an answer, beyond the fact that the male is "naturally *yang*" and the female "naturally *yin*" based upon a relationship to the Mother and the earth. But if this is the case, how are these sexes intelligible? Without the structuring fiction of Paternal Law, how does Kristeva penetrate to this mysterious heart of ancient China's delineation of the sexes without relying upon a theoretical

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[55] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, Anita Barrows, trans., (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 62.

position which *does not apply?* Kristeva herself acknowledges (albeit unintentionally) that the Chinese elude the conceptual categories of Western psychoanalysis when she writes that: "Our psychological 'family' has never existed in China."[56] How is it then, that Kristeva's investigations are capable of escaping that old Platonic paradox of knowledge? How does one seek to know what one does not know?

But let us examine Kristeva's text a little further, to see if we can find something which might serve to rescue Kristeva from this variant of the self-referential paradox. After having delineated the contours of a golden, happy time of ancient Chinese matriarchy, Kristeva turns to the obvious problem of Confucianism. What Confucianism amounts to, for Kristeva, is the absorption of a previously "incontestible" feminine jouissance within the body of the Father, a move by which "society protects itself from the *jouissance* that can drive it to madness or revolution: it keeps itself stable, permanent, eternal."[57] Founded upon the "cult" of ancestor worship, Confucianism elevates the dead *patriarch* (after a "radical, if not abrupt" transformation from a matrilineal society to one based upon the agnatic family) to a position of authority, "obliterating" the difference between the sexes and "censuring" libidinal multiplicity which formerly characterized Chinese relationships.[58] This shift from the maternal order to that of the Father has the express effect of regulating Chinese women, the "nomadic element" and transforms the position of Chinese women from one of "balance" to one in

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[56] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, Anita Barrows, trans., (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 137.
[57] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, Anita Barrows, trans., (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 76.
[58] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, Anita Barrows, trans., (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 74.

which (through footbinding, for example) Chinese women are expected to take completely upon themselves the suffering which is necessary for the constitution of a Chinese community.[59]

The status of footbinding for Kristeva, as a *castration* marking the Chinese uncertainty over the state of the social and symbolic power which Chinese women historically possessed in the matrilineal order, returns us, unfortunately, to the problem of Kristeva's theoretical positioning, since instead of attempting an actual *analysis* of the Chinese family in light of this practice, she remains content to merely read from the surface of Chinese history the truth of that Other, Chinese psychology. In other words, her reading of footbinding as a form of castration effected upon women to restrict the expression of feminine jouissance relies on a flattened picture of Chinese reality; the truth of the Chinese psyche is determinable from the surface of its bodies, without any recourse to the interiority of the Chinese *subject.*

The bodies of Chinese women in the "current" socialist period also attest to the truth of their difference, since Chinese socialism has acknowledged the equality of men and women and *enforced* it in the newly erected social structures which permit the structural positioning of women within positions of social power previously held only by men. Along with equality of employment (Kristeva cites the example of a woman who proudly declares that the new regime has given her access to the job of being an iron worker), the laws of the new regime also make real the "right" of a Chinese woman to retain her own name after marriage. Such leeway in the Symbolic structures of power

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[59] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, Anita Barrows, trans., (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 83.

have the effect, not of "virilizing" Chinese women, as would be the case in the West, but of perhaps permitting Chinese women to "function as an element— as a graphic mark in a network of meanings— in the realms of both impulse and law."[60] This seeming restoration of the nomadic aspect of the lives of Chinese women has the effect of erasing the sexed aspect of their bodies or modulating it into a *masculinity*. Scattered throughout the latter half of the book are references to the Chinese woman freed from the sex of her body. A female Chinese supervisor on the bureau of Educational Reform "smiles, rather like a man,"[61] young Chinese women engaged in a game of volleyball possess "lithe, slender athletic bodies, looking rather like skinny boys,"[62] and hidden within clothes which: "do not suggest the shape of the body," Kristeva "can only suppose the narrow, fragile shoulders, the discreet breasts, the robust hips and belly that, with the short, strong thighs firmly joined to the trunk, for the centre of gravity of these creatures who walk so effortlessly."[63] Even pregnancy is apparently an irrelevant marker of the sex of Chinese women, since despite the cotton dust which is so stifling as to require the stopping up of ears and nose, pregnant women attend the machinery designated to them as lighter labor.[64]

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[60] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, Anita Barrows, trans., (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), pp. 131-132.
[61] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, Anita Barrows, trans., (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 174.
[62] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, Anita Barrows, trans., (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 195.
[63] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, Anita Barrows, trans., (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 158.
[64] Julia Kristeva, *About Chinese Women*, Anita Barrows, trans., (New York: Marion Boyars, 1986), p. 161.

All of which is to render Kristeva's position on the status of Chinese women and the structures of the Chinese Symbolic increasingly untenable. Not only is there the assumption that the categories of Western psychoanalytic theory can be applied to the Chinese sociocultural sphere (despite an implicit acknowledgment of the nonexistence within China of the Western psychological "family" from which Western psychoanalytic theory derives its conceptual apparatus and terminology), as well as the assumption that the resultant psychoanalysis of Chinese sociality is to be read from the surface of Chinese society, *as it appears to Kristeva*, but now we discover that the current phase of Chinese society, some form of socialism, confounds the very sex of the body. These theoretical difficulties, I wish to argue, derive from the fact that Kristeva "others" China at the outset of her investigation. For if China and the Chinese are assumed to already be other, what could any analysis be but a firming up of that alterity? This alterity can even be seen to extend to her conceptualization of the place of "woman" within the Western Symbolic, for as Judith Butler has noted, Kristeva "nevertheless concedes that the semiotic [domain of the maternal body and poetic language] is invariably subordinate to the Symbolic, that its assumes its specificity within the terms of a hierarchy immune to challenge."[65] If this is so, then even the Chinese, laboriously located within the matrix of an Other, maternal order, are nonetheless *still subject to the Law of the (Western) Father*. Thus, Kristeva's "escape" to the realm of the Chinese Other, an attempt to escape the Paternal strictures of the Western Symbolic, ineluctably return her to that Symbolic. Her attempt to theorize the alterity of Chinese woman compels her to remain trapped within the strictures of the West. The presumption that Chinese women inhabit

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[65] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 80.

a sphere completely separate from the cultures of the West serves only to render their experience more incommensurate, more incomprehensible to that of the West. As such, the other, Chinese woman cannot function except as an unattainable liberatory ideal.

6.11 Cultural Interfusion

Although the examinations in this chapter of the signification of cultural difference at play between the social and political worlds of the West and China have been extremely limited both in length and scope, pointing toward the necessity for further analysis of the ways in which the assertion of the singular facticity of cultural difference functions to obscure certain ideological and social processes, what this preliminary leap out into the social and political points to is the fact that technological "progress" has brought us to the point in which our notions of difference and distance need serious rethinking. For these technologies have enabled the cultural interfusion of social spaces to occur with a speed previously unimaginable— I can be in Beijing by tomorrow, if I possess the economic means. Thus, given the inevitability of the increasing heterogeneity of the population which inhabits any given social space, we need to rethink the role and function of "culture" as a signifier of difference.

What I have argued here, hopefully on a convincing level, is that the failure to acknowledge and deal with the problematic status of culture generates theoretical and practical difficulties which would render it impossible for us to ever hope to understand the cultural other. Worse, given the rapidity of cultural interfusion, what reason to I have for believing that even those who profess to be of my culture are anything like me? It would seem that the presumed homogeneity behind the assertion of the existence of *a* culture works only to erase the heterogeneous, individual elements of a given society,

even in one which, like the United States, prides itself upon having a "culture of individuality and individual expression." What could this culture be, given the fact that a culture presumably contains people who all subscribe to a singular way of life?

Chantal Mouffe has suggested that the current limitations in the liberal debate on democracy are the result of its inability to come to terms with the inherent and unavoidable *antagonism* which conditions social existence.[66] But far from constituting the barrier to the realization of democracy, democratic theorists must come to terms with the fact that pluralism entails a level of heterogeneity and conflict which can never be eliminated. The emergence of universal unanimity could only signal the defeat of democracy. In the case of cultural politics which (as demonstrated in the first section of this chapter) has strong links to the democratic vision, what we need to come to terms with is not the fact that the "other" is culturally different from us. Rather, what needs to be rethought is the very antagonism implied in the assertion of the difference between cultures. For this difference marks more than the vagaries of diet and dress. It marks the very limits of the social. If "multiculturalism" is ever to succeed, what is necessary is an understanding of the fact that multiculturalism does *not* signal harmony as much as it does discord.

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[66] See the "Introduction: For an Agonistic Pluralism" as well as "Politics and the Limits of Liberalism" in Chantal Mouffe, *The Return of the Political*, (London: Verso, 1993).

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